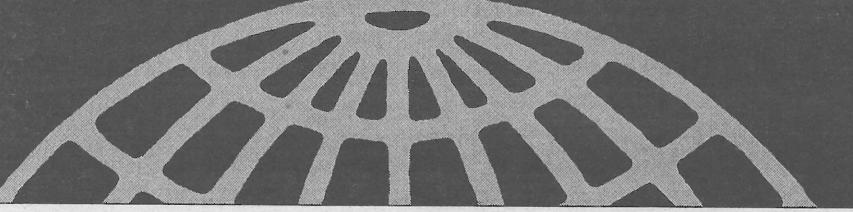


Industrial Worker



OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE
INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

March 2003

#1651 Vol. 100 No. 2

\$1.00 / 75 p

Workers against war

BY JOANN WYPIEWSKI,
COUNTERPUNCH

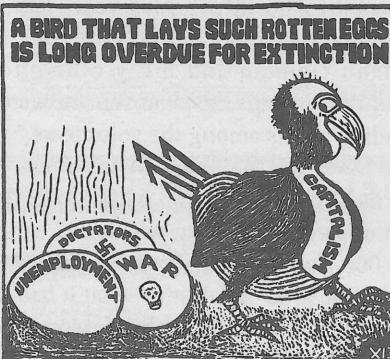
More than 100 union antiwar activists from across the country, gathered in Chicago for a meeting January 11 to initiate a national labor organization against a war that, in its hottest phase, has yet to begin. The term "historic," used throughout the day, was not misplaced. Among the group were Staughton Lynd from Youngstown, who'd chaired the first demonstration on Washington against the Vietnam War in April of 1965; Frank Emepak from Wisconsin, who'd chaired the National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam when it called the first mass days of protest in October 1965; and Jerry Tucker from St. Louis, who was present when unions formed a peace faction outside the ultra-hawkish AFL-CIO in 1971, by which time, as he notes, the Vietnamese had won the war. Something profoundly different is happening now, and while it's unclear how broad labor opposition will become, its very existence represents the deepest crack in the supposed consensus for war.

Unions aren't usually associated with antiwar sentiment. Immediately after 9/11, the Machinists famously bellowed for "vengeance not justice"; John Sweeney said the unions stood "shoulder to shoulder" with George Bush in the war on terror; and many labor leftists dove for cover, saying even raising a discussion on the prospect of endless war was too risky. There was a war at home the latter argued – the sinking economy, assaults on immigrants – and it could be neatly filleted from the war abroad.

At least as many people were killed in Afghanistan as died in New York, and in exchange for fealty to national security through slaughter, the Machinists got layoffs at Boeing, layoffs in the airline industry, a concessionary contract at Lockheed Martin. Sweeney and Co. got to watch as Bush intervened against the West Coast longshore workers and threatened to permanently strip them of the right to strike, as civil servants first in the US Attorneys' offices, then in the Office of Homeland Security lost collective bargaining rights, as immigrants were fired from their airport screening jobs and unions forbidden to organize, as 850,000 government jobs crept toward the privatizing block, as unemployment rose, benefits ran out, the rich got goodies and government workers, soldiers included, were stiffed on pay. For its part, the timorous left got more evidence than needed of the naivete of its argument. (A few bold labor leftists did pay for their early stance against war with the loss of their elective offices, but they were never under illusions that principle comes without a price.)

Now enters U.S. Labor Against the War. Its creation does not signal an about-face by top union leadership, but rather the convergence of an antiwar spirit first expressed in ad hoc labor organizations in New York, San Francisco and Washington, then in an increasing number of local labor bodies throughout the country. The AFL-CIO is still in the war column, though more reluctantly. The executive council

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UK train drivers refuse to haul war freight

On Jan. 8 Scottish train drivers refused to move a freight train carrying ammunition headed for British forces being deployed in the Gulf. EWS rail managers cancelled the train after workers said they opposed the government's threat to attack Iraq. The anti-war revolt is the first such industrial action by British workers since dockers struck in 1973 rather than load British-made arms destined for Chile's military dictatorship.

Two Motherwell-based drivers refused to operate the train between the Glasgow area and the Glen Douglas base on Scotland's west coast, Europe's largest NATO weapons store. Embarrassed rail officials tried to cover up the incident while unsuccessfully leaning on union officials to persuade workers to move the munitions. The ammunition was ultimately moved by truck.

At a meeting of their union branch train drivers approved a statement beginning: "This Motherwell branch is totally opposed to any conflict with Iraq and the USA's seemingly headlong rush into war. We also applaud the ASLEF leadership's stance in opposing the conflict. We are also proud of the EWS members at our branch who have intimated that they have grave reservations if required as part of their duties to drive Ministry of Defence trains at this time."

The statement noted that workers at other depots could also be asked to move munitions. "We have no doubt that many of these drivers will have similar sentiments to ourselves." It concluded "that we, as a trade union and individually, take every opportunity to oppose this conflict."

Meanwhile, unionists expressed outrage

at a new report from business leaders in the UK's Institute of Directors which concluded that a successful war against Iraq would be good for the economy. "In economic terms, a short war is better than no war, or no regime change, because of the removal of uncertainty," the report said.

John Edmonds, general secretary of the giant GMB union, termed the report "an obscenity. For the IoD to argue that we should go to war as a means of stabilising the economy is disgusting. It shows the distorted sense of priorities that occupy some of Britain's boardrooms."

"Once people start saying: 'Oh, economically it would be much better if we had a quick war,' we are on the road to perdition."

Australian industrial action

Western Australian unions say they will launch industrial action across the state immediately following any military strike against Iraq. More than 75,000 workers from nine key unions are set to go ahead even if the United Nations backs the attack.

Unions representing construction, manufacturing, schools, finance and hospital workers are also seeking talks with the government over the possible use of Fremantle port by American warships.

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union state secretary Jock Ferguson said the unions did not support the Iraqi regime but believed all avenues should be exhausted "before we condemn tens of thousands of working people in Iraq to the horrors of war."

However, the Transport Workers Union

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U.S. to gut "antiquated" overtime protections?

BY BRIAN OLIVER SHEPPARD

One item that Pres. George W. Bush did not mention in his recent State of the Union address was his administration's plans to revamp decades-old overtime laws. The Associated Press reports that Bush now "argues that the pillars of American labor law, which established the 40-hour work week, a minimum wage and overtime pay, are antiquated." In particular, Bush wants to scale back laws that protect the 40-hour work week.

Almost as troubling, "congressional action is not required" to enact Bush's new proposals, according to AP. Rather, Bush may simply decree these new regulations into existence through officials at the Labor Department. In March, according to AP, "the Labor Department is expected to issue the new overtime pay rules for public comment." This may be the only chance workers have to voice their concerns to federal officials. Details are expected to be posted at the Labor Department's website at www.dol.gov.

Overtime laws affect nearly 80 million American workers. They require that workers be compensated at time-and-a-half for every hour worked over 40 hours per week. Aside from union contracts, overtime laws are the only thing that prevent employers from demanding 19th century style 10- and 12-hour work days from employees.

The Chamber of Commerce, one of the country's most powerful group of bosses, is the primary force urging the revisions, the media notes. According to AP, "employer groups such as the Chamber of Commerce" are worried about "a surge in overtime pay

litigation aimed at" bosses such as themselves. In December 2002, for example, Oregon Wal-Marts were found guilty of "producing managers to hold down costs by using off-the-clock work to ensure tasks were completed," USA Today reports.

In fact, AP reports that 79 class-action style lawsuits charging unpaid overtime were brought against employers in 2001. The American Bar Association cites this as a growing trend, noting that in 2002 lawsuits alleging overtime abuse surpassed claims of illegal employer discrimination for the first time. But rather than view this as evidence of a growing trend amongst employers to squeeze more unpaid work out of employees, the Bush Administration views it as a case of labor law being to blame.

"They're so difficult to interpret," Labor Secretary Elaine Chao complained about overtime laws in a February AP report. "We're going to change that by bringing these regulations into conformity with the realities of the 21st century workplace," apparently a workplace where 60-plus hour work weeks are the norm.

The Chamber of Commerce responds that its main interest is making higher-income workers lose their overtime pay. Randy Johnson, the chamber's labor vice president, complained to AP reporters that overtime laws are now "distorted to provide overtime to engineers making over \$80,000 a year."

The exact details of the proposed revisions, which are to be released in March, are as yet unknown.

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Industrial Worker
PO Box 13476
Philadelphia, PA 19101

ISSN 0019-8870

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Geese from the North

Geese flying south in V formation always give me a thrill. Some years ago I guided canoe trips in Ontario, and the geese bring with them memories of the lakes, the timber, the lonesome wail of the loons, and my love of mother earth. I always envy their freedom and total disregard for borders and "Private Property" signs. I wondered one day why they always fly in formation, so I got a book on migrating geese.

Wow! They must carry tiny red cards. They fly that way because each bird gives the bird behind them extra lift. They can fly 1.7 times farther than if flying alone with the same amount of effort. If one goose gets sick or wounded, two others will stay with it until it is either well enough to fly or dies. They will then join another flock heading south until they can rejoin their own group. When the lead goose gets tired of breaking the wind, it drops back to the rear and another goose takes its turn at the lead. That makes sense, eh?

It probably took many years of evolution for geese to figure out that only those that flew as a close-knit group survived. I wonder if working people will evolve to the understanding that solidarity is our only chance of survival. Then again, maybe we don't have the brains of a goose. We're always trying to fly higher and faster than the worker behind us. Tiring yet?

Gary Cox

Crime & Parasites

This is a belated response to Raymond Solomon's letter in the November IW. I wonder if the people murdered by death squads in South America to further corporate oil interests would see a huge distinction between corporate criminals and "street" crimi-

nals. Would the millions sacrificed in capital's wars see a big difference? Street crime is a serious problem, and Raymond is right to point out the danger of criminal gangs or fascist white supremacist gangs. Simply labeling them parasitic will not suffice, though, as gangsterism seems to run fairly prevalent in low income neighborhoods.

Readers' Soapbox

These are issues I deal with as a prisoner every day when trying to persuade prisoners to become class conscious instead of operating on capitalism's dog eat dog values.

You could point a finger at many other aspects of the working class which are parasitic besides street crime, such as racist and bigoted attitudes, failure to act solid with other workers, doing jobs that hurt other workers such as repression jobs or cutting people's power off for failure to pay, joining the military – even driving cars which pollute could be considered parasitical. This is not meant to exonerate street criminals or belittle victims' suffering, but to point out the many dimensions on non class conscious activity the working class engages in and to point out that that's the deal we're dealin' in. None of them as perpetrators are irredeemable, but many need to learn to act differently. This is part of the work I'm engaged in working with the ABC network.

In Solidarity, Kevin Glover
co-editor of *Chain Reaction*

Syndicalist/socialist roots

Regarding Joshua Freeze's letter: while the Industrial Workers of the World is not identical with anarchism, syndicalism or left-wing socialism, it does share a historical connection with these movements that the IWW does not share with today's Republican party, the Chamber of Commerce, or the British Conservative party.

To take one example, on page 378 of *Rebel Voices* it is reported that, "During the Spanish Civil War, the IWW had an assessment for support of the [anarcho-syndicalist] CNT and maintained friendly relations with the anarchist International Working-

men's Association. Many IWW fought with CNT forces." A moving article by Raymond Galstad follows, describing his experiences in the war. Carlo Tresca and Sam Dolgoff were both Wobblies and anarchists. Five-time Socialist presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs was one of the founders of the IWW.

Freeze points out that many workers do not in any way identify with these ideas. This is not to say that those conservative workers should not be reached out to. A significant revival of the labor movement should include all elements of labor, although militant workers should be in the vanguard.

I'd also like to point out, in connection with my December 2002 letter "On Israel," that not only was Israel originally operated along syndicalist lines, its very conception and birth was a product of the left-wing Russian socialist labor movement. To make this point, I referred to Valdimir Jabolinsky's *Story of the Jewish Legion* about events transpiring during World War I. (It should be noted that Jabolinsky and the labor Zionists became bitter enemies.)

"In Jaffa and Tel-Aviv, too, all the volunteers were workers, or college graduates who were preparing to join the workers' movement. Berl Katzenelson, later editor of *Davar*, Yavnieli, who in previous years had first brought Yemenites to Palestine, Dov Hos, Eliahu Golomb and many others today prominent in the labor movement were the leading spirits among the volunteers."

Many of the socialist laborites even formed their own legion while under Turkish oppression. Turkey, which had expelled 60,000 Jews from Palestine, was planning to do to the Jews of Palestine what it had done to the Armenians. Turkey had massacred over one and a half million Armenians in 1915.

If Israel is to survive, she must go back to her syndicalist-socialist-labor roots.

In solidarity and shalom,
Raymond Solomon

Airline workers

I would like to compliment Joshua Freeze for writing an excellent article on workers in the airline industry (January/February, p. 5). This attack is of great impor-

tance in St. Louis, which is heavily dependent on the airline industry.

Two things, however, need to be added: The productivity of airline workers has gone up since 1991 (see *Aviation Week*, Nov. 18 2002, p. 68). When workers justly claim more of their increased productivity in pay, this cannot be described as a series of "outrageous labor agreements," as the bosses' propaganda would have us believe.

The next time somebody shows you something about how unions wrecked the American airline industry, remember that the European airlines are doing quite well even though airport workers in Europe have a reputation for being "militant." Even so, European airline bosses have been able to buy out U.S. airlines or set up lucrative partnerships with them.

Perhaps we should remember these facts when we hear the silly propaganda about how mean-spirited pilots, flight attendants and machinists got together one night and decided to wreck their own industry!

Robert G. Rice II

Argentine autonomist tour

As Argentina tumbles further into uncharted financial crisis an ongoing direct democracy movement has developed that has become a living laboratory of struggle – a space where the politics of the future are being reinvented. The Argentine Autonomist Project is organizing a tour featuring lectures and cultural presentations on the unemployed workers movement, neighborhood assemblies, and worker-occupied and managed workplaces, as well as the significant role of women in the movement.

The tour begins with a puppet show at the April FTAA protest in Washington DC before touring the U.S. and Europe. The tour will also include two Piquetera speakers from Argentina, puppets, musician David Rovics, and others. It is coordinated by Argentine human rights activist and artist Graciela Monteagudo (mggraciela9@aol.com).

For more information, or to see if a local appearance can be scheduled, visit the project on the web at <http://members.aol.com/autonomista1/tour.htm>

Industrial Worker

The Voice of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism

- ★ ORGANIZATION
- ★ EDUCATION
- ★ EMANCIPATION

Official newspaper of the
Industrial Workers
of the World
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ISSN 0019-8870 Periodicals
postage paid Philadelphia, PA
and other mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address
changes to: Industrial Worker,
POB 13476, Phila. PA 19101 USA

Individual Subscriptions: \$15
Library Subs: \$20/year
(Member sub included in dues)

Published eleven times per year
printed by Teamsters union labor



Articles not so designated do not
reflect the official position of the
IWW. Contributions welcome.

Press Date: February 10, 2003

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Solidarity with Azteca strikers

On Friday, January 31, the Chicago IWW spent the afternoon down on the south side with the striking women of the Azteca tortilla factory. In celebration of their four month anniversary and to show our support for their courage and dedication, eight members of our branch went to hear their stories and wave some picket signs.

Now January in Chicago isn't the best time to stand around outside. Friday, Chicago woke up to drizzling rain and cold, not exactly ideal picket weather; however the day became filled with warmth in so many ways. When we arrived at the encampment, located at the entrance to the Azteca factory, we were ushered into a makeshift home of tarps, cardboard and foam which was warm and dry. The strikers take turns on the line, two at a time for two hours, 24 hours a day. They tell us some days this time is filled with inspiration and hope, and other days isolation and sadness. The women who were there when we arrived took us in and slowly but surely we began talking.

All our conversations took place in Spanish, as none of the workers are comfortable conversing in English, but we made it work (with lots of laughter). We heard their stories, their demands, and their hope for a better workplace. The woman who sat beside me had worked in the factory for 25 years, she met her husband there (he had worked for Azteca for 28 years), has since had eight children, and on Friday had brought her 19-year-old son to the line with her.

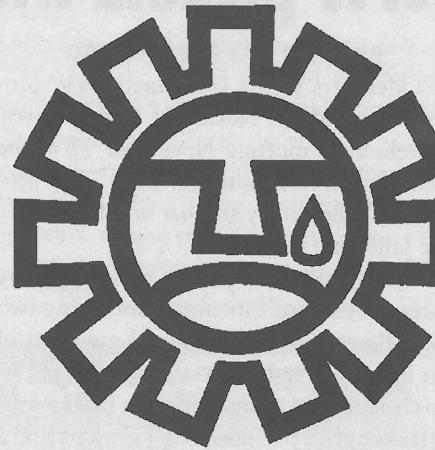
There are about 60 workers on strike, 20 who stayed inside, and temps who are brought as scabs to the factory each shift; remarkably, not a single striking worker has crossed the line to go back to work since the strike began. Most of the strikers are women, and all but two have come from Mexico. While we discussed wage issues (they receive a 5 cent raise each year, which doesn't even keep up with inflation; no raise was given last year), the workers were clear that wages were not the main reason they decided to strike. Dignity, they said – being treated as human beings – was the focus of their strike.

They have been suffering horrible working conditions, verbal abuse, a refusal by the boss to admit OSHA inspectors, etc. The workers have been in contract negotiations since May 14, but in spite of appeals from religious and community leaders to negotiate fairly, the millionaire factory owner, Arthur Velasquez, continues to demand concessions. Those concessions include lockout rights, cuts in medical and maternity leaves, the eradication of seniority rights, increased use of minimum wage temporary workers who have no benefits, a ban on union newsletters on company premises, and more.

How can you tell someone who has worked their whole life in a single factory, treated like dirt and paid even worse, that they don't have the right to ask for better?

Their attitude was contagious. After several hours of discussing their lives and this strike, we were prompted to go out into the weather and be a visible presence for these workers. A Teamster delivery driver had seen the encampment and inquired if there was a strike at this factory. When he discovered there was, he turned away, refusing to cross the line. The workers say about 5 percent of truckers refuse to cross, but the remaining 95%, some union others not, ignore them.

After about 20 minutes outside, a shift change occurred and we became an active



force scolding scabs ("piojos!") as they crossed the line (the boss even drove by; a rare event the workers say, but an inspiring moment for us all and we loudly let him know we were all unhappy!).

A UPS driver, new to the job apparently, came and picked up some packages from the Azteca office, only to be told by us that there was a strike and he shouldn't cross the line. Luckily, another UPS driver happened to be parked at the company next door, and so, he went to consult with him. This driver explained to him that he needed to return the packages. After talking with us again, then calling his union steward for advice, he notified us he would be returning the packages and proudly walked back into the office, returning empty-handed. I was so impressed. He could have so easily ignored us and went on with his day, but instead he courageously walked back in there and made a little piece of the boss's day that much more difficult.

We would like to ask all IWWs to boycott Azteca products (tortillas and chips), and spread the word about this strike. For more information from their union, UE, go to: http://www.ranknfile-ue.org/1159azteca_home.html To send a pledge to boycott Azteca products to go to: <http://www.ranknfile-ue.org/cm/aztboycott.php>.

As for the Chicago branch, picket line support will be a regular event. ¡UN HERIDO A UNO ES UN HERIDO A TODOS!

Preamble to the IWW Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Carleton University projectionists organize

BY BRADEN CANNON, X351663

On January 7, projectionists working at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, voted unanimously to organize with Education Workers Industrial Union 620 (IWW), affiliating with the Ottawa-Outaouais GMB. The projectionists are all students working part time for the film studies program of the university's School for Studies in Arts and Culture (SSAC).

The campaign began in early November 2002, when I was approached by one of the projectionists, Ryan Burke, who was not a Wob at the time. FW Burke explained to me that the projectionists were experiencing problems with their supervisor, Lukas Ridgeway, who is SSAC technical director and is thus responsible for all of the projecting equipment and the projectionists.

The supervisor had accused one of the projectionists, André Coutu, of theft of Carleton University Film Society funds. Furthermore, FW Coutu and Ridgeway did not work well together on a personal basis. Ridgeway told Coutu that he would not be "re-hired" for the winter semester, an unprecedented move on Ridgeway's part. The projectionists felt that Ridgeway was firing Coutu for strictly personal reasons and that it was time to do something about it.

The situation with FW Coutu was merely the straw that broke the camel's back, however. The projectionists were increasingly unhappy with their work situation as the longer Ridgeway was their supervisor, the less control they had over their work.

Before Ridgeway became supervisor, the projectionists were able to schedule themselves and received comprehensive training on all of the department's equipment. However, after Ridgeway became SSAC's technical director, all training ceased (leaving new projectionists without the skills necessary to do their jobs effectively) and the projectionists' schedules were set at his whim.

This is the situation which greeted the Ottawa-Outaouais GMB when we became involved. After discussing the issue with FW Burke and other workers, the projectionists decided that the IWW was the appropriate union for them.

When word of the unionization effort reached SSAC administration, the projectionists were told that no union would accept them due to their casual status. Soon, the halls of SSAC were abuzz with word of the return of the Wobblies. Professors mused that they didn't know that the IWW was still around and that we should sing "Joe Hill" at our meetings, while the administration began doing some research into the history of the One Big Union.

Before long, every projectionist had signed applications to join the IWW, and we requested that Carleton University voluntarily recognize the union. Having been refused, we filed an application with the Ontario Labour Relations Board for union certification, and an OLRB vote was set for Jan. 7.

On the day of the vote, the union won unanimously, and Stephen Green, assistant director of academic staff relations for Carleton University, expressed regret at having wasted everyone's time when he had the chance to voluntarily recognize the union a month beforehand.

At the present time, the projectionists have all signed red cards, elected a shop committee, job delegate, and bargaining committee, and are in the process of planning a bargaining strategy while we await final certification from the OLRB.

The Carleton University Student Projectionists Job Branch is the first IWW job branch organized in Ottawa since the current Ottawa-Outaouais GMB was granted a charter on November 15, 1993, but there will be many more in the years to come.

Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 13476, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$1,000, dues are \$6 a month. If your monthly income is between \$1,000 - \$2,000, dues are \$12 a month. If your monthly income is over \$2,000 a month, dues are \$18 a month.

- I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer
- I agree to abide by the IWW constitution
- I will study its principles and make myself acquainted with its purposes.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Membership includes a subscription to the Industrial Worker.

Midwest Wobfest 2003

The weekend of 20-22 June will see the 2003 Midwest Wobfest in Milwaukee, Wisc. The Milwaukee GMB is planning workshops, speakers and get-togethers that will make good use of the long daylight hours. All Wobs are invited. Lodging and some meals will be available at little or no cost.

Milwaukee is a rustbelt town with a long and honorable labor history. Details will be available soon – mark your calendar.





by F.N. Brill

"Every joke is a tiny revolution... Whatever destroys dignity, and brings down the mighty from their seats, preferably with a bump, is funny. And the bigger the fall, the bigger the joke... The truth is that you cannot be memorably funny without at some point raising topics which the rich, the powerful and the complacent would prefer to see left alone."

— George Orwell

★ ★ ★

In the United States, a man of Japanese ancestry will be admitted to the bar posthumously, almost a century after being denied based on his race in 1902. The only other dead person in the United States currently practicing law is Senator Strom Thurmond as Bush is only brain dead.

★ ★ ★

The new Ronald Reagan stamps wouldn't stick. I was totally confused. Then I realized I was spitting on the wrong side.

★ ★ ★

On the sixth day God turned to Archangel Gabriel and said: "Today I am going to create a land called Canada. It will be a land of outstanding natural beauty. It shall have tall majestic mountains full of mountain goats and eagles, beautiful sparkling lakes bountiful with bass and trout, forests full of elk and moose, high cliffs over-looking sandy beaches with an abundance of sea life, and rivers stocked with salmon."

God continued, "I shall make the land rich in oil so as to make the inhabitants prosper, I shall call these inhabitants Canadians, and they shall be known as the most friendly people on the earth." "But Lord," asked Gabriel, "don't you think you are being too generous to these Canadians?"

"Not really," replied God, "just wait and see the neighbors I am going to give them."

★ ★ ★

It's been decided that the American people no longer need stereos. The reason? Because we hear the same thing from all sides...

★ ★ ★

"Drunken frat boy steals country and drives it into ditch."

★ ★ ★

A man was in New York's Central Park, when a dog went wild and attacked a young boy. The man was able to grab the dog by the neck, pulling it off the boy and choking it to death. A reporter for the *N.Y. Times* comes to interview him, congratulating him on his act of heroism. He suggests the headline: *New Yorker saves the life of a young boy!*

"But," the man told him, "I'm not from New York." "Ok, then how about: American hero saves the day?" But, the man told him, "I'm not American." "Then, where are you from?" asked the reporter. "I'm from Pakistan," the man answered.

The next day the headlines read: MUSLIM FUNDAMENTALIST STRANGLES DOG IN CENTRAL PARK. FBI INVESTIGATING POSSIBLE LINKS TO AL QAEDA.

★ ★ ★

In recent months, at the same time that the Bush administration was mobilizing support for a military invasion of Iraq, other administration representatives were working with Iraq (and Iran, Libya, Sudan and the Vatican, and against almost all of the U.S.'s traditional allies) to resist United Nations worldwide support of "reproductive health services" (including abortion), sex education (except "abstinence") and gay rights.

★ ★ ★

IWW Medical Service is recruiting research volunteers to study Compliance Acquiescent Disorder. If you are between the ages of 6 and 89 and experience the following symptoms, you may be eligible to participate in our research study.

Symptoms of Compliance Acquiescent Disorder: Defers to authority, Actively obeys rules, Believes commercial media, Fails to argue back, Knuckles under instead of mobilizing others in support, Stays restrained when outrage is warranted, Blames self or other individuals for what are social problems, Hesitates to join with others to make a difference. Research-Related Care Includes: Assessment and Diagnosis, Skill Enhancement, No Study Medication, Resource Referral, Solidarity.

The doctors in this investigation are now studying approaches to help children and adults with CAD. All research-related care is provided at no cost to those who qualify. For more information about becoming a volunteer, call the IWW.

★ ★ ★

The British news website "The Brain Trust" reports new UK government plans to put the elderly to work "beyond death": "With the looming pensions crisis approaching hyperbolic meltdown, the British Government is urgently considering emergency plans to ensure that they do not have to cover the financial burden of an ageing population. Under the terms of the new legislation, people will be forced to save more and work longer throughout their lifetimes, and preferably after they're dead as well."

"Under the proposals, many jobs will simply be staffed by the rotting corpses of previous employees. ... In high tech industries, many corpses could find themselves being cryogenically frozen and used for research into super conductors, with the added advantage of being revived in the future, cured of what killed them, and put back into work for another 70 joyful and productive years."

The rotting corpse, FN Brill encourages the electric currents of your comments to be sent to him at fnbrill@yahoo.com or c/o IWW, 616 E. Burnside, Portland, Oregon, USA

Protesting is good for your health

Psychologists at the University of Sussex have found that people who get involved in campaigns, strikes and political demonstrations experience improved psychological well-being that helps them overcome stress, pain, anxiety and depression.

Researcher John Drury says the results suggest that people might wish to join so-

cial movements "not only in the wider interest of social change but also for their own personal good."

"Participants experienced a deep sense of happiness and even euphoria in being involved in protest events," Drury said. "Simply recounting the events in the interview brought a smile to the[ir] face."

IWW pickets win severance pay

BY TOM KAPPAS, IU 660

Members of the Cincinnati IWW protested outside of Northeast Cooperatives' shareholders meeting November 12 at the Ramada Inn in Columbus, Ohio. This protest was followed by another in Albany, N.Y., the following week.

The Columbus picket was joined by three Wobs from Cincinnati, including two Twin Pines workers. We stood out front of the hotel with signs that said "Northeast Co-ops Unfair" and "Bargaining Not Blackmail." After about 15 minutes, hotel workers and a manager came out to see what was going on. We explained that we were in a dispute with Northeast Cooperatives and were picketing the shareholders inside. The hotel personnel were really cool and let us be.

After our rendition of 'Solidarity Forever' with lines like "solidarity forever - the union makes us cold" and lots of hot coffee the shareholders started to come out. Several shareholders came up and talked to us. A few were worker-members from Northeast's warehouse in Columbus. They expressed their concern and solidarity and wished there was more they could do to help.

After the shareholders came out, Mark Slagh, director of operations at Northeast's Columbus warehouse, came out to his car to put a few things away. I approached him stating that the union was going to file an ULP on Northeast if things were not fixed. He said he didn't know what I was talking about, so I gave him a letter for Northeast CEO George Southworth.

Twenty minutes after we talked to the boss, we decided to get going - having been standing outside for two hours in the cold. As we passed the hotel lounge we saw Mark

Slagh and others sipping drinks and eating and laughing around a table. That made us really angry, but instead of going to crash the party we flyered all the cars in the lot and headed home.

The following Monday, a phone call from Mark Slagh came on my answering machine wanting to discuss IWW issues over coffee. The next day a solidarity action was to happen in Albany, N.Y. After many failed attempts to set up a meeting, we finally set a date to meet with Mr. Slagh at a small cafe down the street from the old store. Fellow worker Damron agreed to help us with the negotiations. Slagh stated that Northeast was about \$8 million in debt and said he would do his best to see if any more severance money was available for us. Overall, it was a good meeting and afterward we were pretty happy with the results.

Northeast members were voting the next week to sell the company to United Natural Foods - a huge natural foods distributor and all loose ends had to be tied up by the end of December. Twin Pines workers won one week of severance pay for each year for each of the employees.

Overall, as the delegate for the IWW at Twin Pines I would say that the campaign was successful. We had high points and we had low points. But overall I think it was a good opportunity to educate Natural Foods workers on the IWW and unions in general. Cincinnati IWW IU 660 is sitting in several retail stores in the area and on the unemployment line now. Hopefully, we will use the knowledge gained from the Twin Pines campaign to inspire ourselves and others to the advantages of organizing, industrial unions, and the IWW.

Winnipeg Wobs picket Stella's Cafe

BY DAVID SAUER

Winnipeg Wobs braved the cold on two consecutive Sundays in January to protest the unjust firing of fellow Wob John Stillwell. He was fired Jan. 12 for trying to organize workers at Stella's Cafe and Bakery, located in Winnipeg's Osborne Village section.

Stella's was violating provincial labour law by granting workers only a 20-minute break for an eight-hour shift. Labour laws require a 30-minute break for shifts longer than five hours. John had discussed this with management, who took no action on the issue. He was in the process of organizing a meeting for workers who wanted to join the IWW when he was fired.

The Winnipeg IWW quickly mobilized and a meeting was held with John and interested Stella's workers. It was agreed that an informational picket during Stella's peak business hours on Sunday morning and filing an Unfair Labour Practice with the Manitoba Labour Board would be the best courses of action. (The charge is set to be heard March 21.)

At 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, January 19, amid -25°C (-13°F) weather, Winnipeg Wobs gathered outside Stella's along with supporters. They had prepared picket signs, leaflets, and with thanks to fellow worker Garth Hardy had rewritten the lyrics to "Which Side Are You On" to coincide with the action:

"Come all you good people, There's some news for you to hear, Work at Stella's Bakery ain't as cool as it appears..."

Their numbers peaked at 15 around 11:30 a.m. Local Wobs, supporters and Stella's workers were on the line distributing leaflets titled "Stella's minus John Stillwell equals Unfair Labour Practices." Signs reading "Give John his job back!" and "Organizing is NOT a crime!" received supportive honks from passing cars. Several Wobs began singing "Which Side Are You On?" with the new and improved lyrics.

Many patrons, after reading the leaflet, left the restaurant or walked away saying they would eat somewhere else that morning. Several passersby read the leaflet and then

walked into the restaurant to let management know their disgust. Members of other unions, including the United Food and Commercial Workers, the Canadian Auto Workers and Canadian Union of Postal Workers showed great interest in the picket and asked what action they could take to help. Advised that speaking with management, either in person or over the phone, and refusing to eat at Stella's would be the greatest help, they took note and took action.

The line soon took up most of the small sidewalk, which brought Winnipeg police to the scene at the request of Stella's management. Police found that the picketers were not impeding customers' entrance in Stella's as management had charged. After speaking with management, the police left the scene, even giving a "Good luck" to the picketers.

Local news media also took interest. A photographer from the *Winnipeg Free Press* photographed picketers asking them to "show big solidarity with John!" A producer from Canada's national CBC newsradio service had been eating at Stella's that morning and requested one of his journalists interview John Stillwell regarding his firing.

With all the momentum from the picket, the Winnipeg IWW decided to picket again the following Sunday.

With even colder temperatures steady at -28°C (-18°F), Winnipeg Wobs braved the cold January 26th with more determination. This time local Wobs decided to become even more vocal, singing not only an updated version of "Which Side Are You On?" but also new and improved versions of "Hallelujah I'm A Bum" and "Mysteries of a Baker's Life" provided by fellow worker Patrick McGuire.

Knowing the police would be powerless to stop the picketing, management could only look on in disgust. Support for the picket was strong, and the public again let management know.

On January 31, the IWW filed its Unfair Labour Practice against Stella's Cafe and Bakery, charging that John Stillwell was fired for trying to organize a union. Monthly pickets are also planned.

Rail workers' families rebel against crew fatigue

BY BALTIMORE RED

In response to a series of fatigue-related train wrecks, coupled with company harassment of train and engine crews who take time off work, a group called Railroad Employee Safety & Quality was put together in September not by railroad workers themselves, but by the wives and family members of railroaders in the 23 states in which the Union Pacific, the nation's largest freight railroad, operates its trains.

According to the RRESQ website, their goal is to seek "proactive ways to improve the working conditions and safety... at Union Pacific Railroad. Our primary agenda is to stop fatigue on the railroad... We care less about the price of stock than we do about the cost of human lives."

Refusal by most of the nation's carriers to schedule freight train operations in a rational manner, combined with a reluctance to hire and train enough employees to adequately staff train crews, has resulted in a crisis of severely fatigued freight train crews – not just at Union Pacific, but at the other major "class one" carriers as well. In the St. Louis area, Union Pacific has allowed the crew shortage to reach critical levels. Yet, rather than take measures to provide adequate staffing, UP has responded to the crisis with harassment, threats, intimidation and punishment of those engineers and conductors who take time off work.

This vicious attitude on the part of the carrier, where even longtime dedicated employees with spotless records are summoned in for "investigations" (disciplinary hearings) was the direct catalyst instigating RRESQ to organize. Peggy Shrum, one of about sixty people who came together to found the group, is fed up. "In my husband's 29 years with the railroad, he's never been investigated for anything. Now he faces this." Shrum's husband was disciplined recently for not meeting the UP's strict availability guidelines. By threatening discipline and even firing employees for taking time off work, RRSEQ says UP is making a dangerous and unsafe situation worse. Railroaders around the country

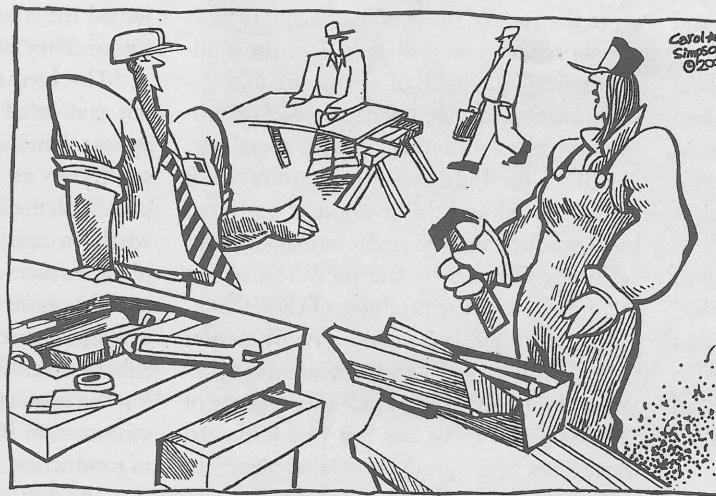
agree that given the current conditions, it is just a matter of time before a disastrous wreck occurs which not only results in the deaths of rail workers, but in the deaths of hundreds or even thousands of others.

Crew fatigue and short staffing is nothing new. For years, rail crews have put in long hours, worked open-ended schedules, and been subject to call morning, noon and night. Most employees have no set shift, no rotation pattern, and no set days off. In the past, however, employees were more free to "mark off" when they wanted time off. However, the railroad carriers have followed the lead of other industries and instituted deep cuts in personnel across the board in recent years in order to present a prettier picture to Wall Street. The carriers do not want their employees to have time off since that would mean hiring more workers.

Aside from some vague contract language regarding an employee's "mark off privileges," the only restriction governing the hours that a railroad engineer or conductor can work is the federal hours-of-service law. The law mandates only two things: 1) the carrier cannot require an employee to perform service after being on-duty for 12 hours; and 2) the carrier must provide 8 hours rest between tours of duty (10 if on-duty for 12 or more). Keep in mind that the 8 (or 10) hours off starts the moment the worker marks off-duty and leaves the work site. Given travel, meal and cleanup time, etc., plus an advance two-hour telephone call of notice to return to work, far less than 8 hours is available for actual "rest." In addition, while the carrier may not work an employee more than 12 hours, in actual fact it is routine to be on-duty far longer, as a crew may spend hours waiting in the cab of a locomotive, in the yard office or shanty waiting on a cab to shuttle them, sometimes a long dis-

tance, to their off-duty location. Seven-day 80-hour weeks are commonplace.

"The eight-hour rest rule is a joke," claims Mae Campbell. "My husband rarely



"Fire your family. I'm gonna need you nights and weekends."

gets to stay home eight hours. ... I fear that he will fall asleep at the wheel one night driving home." For example, "He comes in at midnight and is called out by 5 a.m." Campbell says that when there is a train wreck, the railroad will find the cause to be "human error," drugs, alcohol or some fault of the employee. "No one would bother to consider their schedules and see how many runs they've made or lack of sleep ... prior to the incident."

In 1998, following a number of corporate takeovers by UP, first of the Chicago Northwestern and then the Southern Pacific, the railroad was investigated by the Federal Railroad Administration. Coming on the heels of a string of spectacular wrecks that killed nine employees, the FRA investigation found that the UP was operating at inadequate staffing levels and demanded that the carrier hire more T&E employees.

According to the RRESQ's Shrum the UP did hire a batch, "but then laid them off soon after ... In the last few years, they have worked employees to exhaustion." Shrum and her organization blame fatigue for another spate of fatal train wrecks over the past year or so. In addition, a rash of strokes and heart attacks, resulting in a number of deaths on the UP can be attributed, says RRESQ, to fatigue and related stresses.

Meanwhile, UP CEO Dick Davidson announced Oct. 24 that his railroad had posted an all-time record net income of \$437 million. Davidson said "this trend (double-digit growth in earnings for four straight quarters) is further proof that our business strategy is on target." RRSEQ responds that, "They (UP) have not instituted technology that would improve train scheduling ... they have cut corners on track repair, signaling system upgrades and routine but essential maintenance. ... Manpower shortages are critically high in most service units, management harassment is at an all-time high, while morale has sunk to an all-time low." On January 23, the railroad announced that it expects to cut 1,000 jobs this year.

While RRESQ is very pro-union, Shrum

2 million lost jobs

The U.S. economy has fallen into its worst hiring slump in almost 20 years, and is now even worse than it was at a comparable point in the so-called jobless recovery of the early 1990s, according to recently revised statistics from the Labor Department.

The economy has lost more than two million jobs since the most recent recession began in March 2001, as layoffs have continued despite the resumption of economic growth more than a year ago. While the official unemployment rate has held steady, more than a million workers have given up looking for jobs and so are no longer considered unemployed. A new Northeastern University reports there are 5.5 million discouraged 16- to 24-year-old workers nationwide, a number that is growing fast. Many may never find a secure foothold in the job market.

and the others make clear that they have been driven to act by the lack of union leadership and initiative on this and other issues. Shrum believes that since 1998 the UP has routinely violated labor agreements and that the leadership of both the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the United Transportation Union are incapable of or unwilling to defend the rights and the safety of their memberships. While local officials have been "working hard to keep pace and defend members" against the harsh attendance policy, "we did not see a hard-hitting response from the union leaders in Cleveland" (headquarters for both unions). The unions' inaction inspired the RRSEQ to write BLE President Don Hash and tell him, "Lead or get out of the way!"

The group has also ruffled the feathers of the UTU. In an article entitled "Be Careful of Well-Meaning Efforts," UTU National Legislative Director James Brunkenhoefer wrote, "The solution is not signing petitions or writing letters crafted by the unelected and unappointed ... Such well meaning efforts may be helping our enemies."

One thing that both the union officials and the RRSEQ certainly would agree on is that the rail unions, like most other unions in basic industry around the country, have witnessed a severe erosion of their power over the last two or three decades. Their numbers have been greatly reduced and their right to strike and take "self-help action" under the Railway Labor Act in modern times, for all intents and purposes, no longer exists. "Without the threat of a strike," says Shrum, "they have no leverage."

But with the Congress and the federal regulatory agencies firmly in the grip of conservative, antilabor forces, both the RRESQ, with its confrontational grass-roots approach, and the unions, with their cautious "professional" approach, have a hard row to hoe. Any attempt to influence federal policy through lobbying efforts in this environment is a monumental task.

However, RRESQ has sounded the alarm and issued the call to action. The group is gaining momentum around the country. They are looking into expanding beyond the UP system to other railroad systems such as the Burlington Northern Santa Fe and the Norfolk Southern where workers have also been subject to severe staffing shortage, crew fatigue, and harsh attendance policies.

In addition to organizing family members and concerned citizens around the issue, RRESQ has the potential to build alliances with unions (on the railroad and elsewhere), community and environmental groups who are concerned with the unsafe shipment of toxic chemicals through both populous and natural areas. Perhaps the true test of the RRESQ will be if it is able to light a fire under a demoralized rank-and-file and inspire railroad workers around the country to organize and fight back, not simply through legislative means, but by reasserting their power on the job as well.

RRESQ is planning an informational picket around the issue of rail safety at rail terminals around the country on March 1. For more information on the RRESQ, see their website www.rresq.com

Israel threatens unpaid workers with deportation

Two dozen Chinese laborers who went to Israel's Labor and Social Affairs Ministry to complain that they had not received their wages for over two months were surrounded by police and threatened with deportation after they objected to the Ministry's "solution" that they work another month before receiving their wages. The workers left after securing a promise that the building company that employs them would meet to arbitrate the dispute.

AFL hosts organizing summit

AFL-CIO leaders convened an organizing summit in Washington January 10-11, bringing together some 200 full-time staffers and elected officials from 39 affiliated unions. The conference was chaired by the federation's fourth organizing director in the last five years, Stewart Acuff.

Despite the Sweeney administration's much heralded goal of organizing a million new members a year, AFL unions are struggling to bring in a tenth that number. Speakers discussed tactics including neutrality agreements, using union pension plans to pressure targeted firms, and mobilizing community support to make it more difficult for employers to intimidate workers.

The AFL-CIO plans a national campaign to win the right to organize, and summit participants suggested civil disobedience actions to focus attention on what CWA vice president Larry Cohen termed the "disgrace" of the National Labor Relations Board.

"The public has no idea about what employers are doing to destroy the freedom to

READ

GEORGE ORWELL: The Revolutionary



SEND A SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE TO:

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Free Voices, The Solomon Press
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Beyond Kyoto: Capitalism is not sustainable

BY EDMONTON IWW

A radical critique of capitalism demands that we move beyond the pro- and anti-Kyoto debate. The fact is that Kyoto is flawed. It is a "capitalist solution" to climate change and the ecological crisis we face.

The Kyoto accord allows for nations and corporations to develop technological and capitalist/market driven solutions for green house gas emissions. It allows for the capitalist ideology of pollution credits, which is one of its key market principles.

Kyoto is flawed because it arises out of the belief that capitalism can be sustainable, which is contradicted by the simple fact that capitalism needs to grow and accumulate in order to be sustained. It is exactly this need to accumulate and grow that has created the ecological crisis.

Sustainable development means many things to many people, in this case to capitalists it means growth, accumulation and profit that is ongoing. Any social or technological changes made, such as addressing the environmental impacts of resource extraction and manufacturing means that corporations will tinker with technology that cleans up their dirty businesses. The primary business of extraction and production will not essentially change it will just be more "environmentally friendly."

Kyoto was the outcome of the United Nations Rio conference on the environment and sustainable development. It was the UN's way of addressing the ecological crisis of capitalism. It coincided with the development of international free trade agreements. Kyoto speaks in the same language as the free trade agreements. It allows corporations and their governments to come up with solutions to reduce greenhouse gases in their own way at their own speed, as long as those emissions are reduced to 1990 levels.

The accord and the whole sustainable development model is a corporatist model. Kyoto says we only wish to ameliorate the

worst excesses of capitalist development, not eliminate it as the source of the environmental crisis.

The debate pro- and anti-Kyoto does not go to the root of the problem. Capitalism is the source of climate change. It is the modern historical source of environmental destruction and change since it is based on production for profit rather than for social use.

Since the Industrial Revolution's "dark Satanic mills" and the creation of coal fired mass production, the environment has been seriously affected by the pollution of the technology and the products of capitalism.

In the past 100 years, environmental degradation has been greater than in the previous thousand. This rapid acceleration of the ecological crisis has not just impacted the regions where production takes place, but the whole globe.

So if capitalism is the root cause of our environmental crisis why then are we discussing Kyoto? Kyoto reflects the attempt by governments, corporations and civil society (NGO's, environmentalists, and the labour movement) to ameliorate the worst environmental excesses of capitalism.

Kyoto is defended as a reform limiting capitalist excess. Yet the labour movement is divided on this issue, as are politicians, scientists and corporations

It's all about jobs

Capitalist production equals jobs. Change the nature of production and you impact the lives of working people who will defend their current means of livelihood, and who can blame them. This is the defensive aspect of class struggle.

Since the Luddites smashed the factory machines in the 1820s, in favour of home-based production, the struggle of the working class has been to hold back the inevitable tide of change which capitalism brings.

The Alberta Federation of Labour, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian

Autoworkers and the Communications Energy and Paperworkers are promoting Kyoto in order to save jobs.

The Alberta Building Trades Council joined the Alberta government in opposing Kyoto. They want to save jobs.

The house of labour is not as divided as it may first appear. Unions pro and con see Kyoto as impacting on jobs. Both the building trades workers and the CEP gas plant workers see Kyoto impacting on oil sands and energy plant expansion in Alberta. Neither is challenging the root cause of the environmental health problem of production in a capitalist system.

The building trade unions, taking a short-term view, say that this will impact on their jobs by reducing oil sands expansion projects. In fact Kyoto favours retrofitting, which their members will do.

The pro Kyoto unions talk about transition funding to replace lost jobs, and to create new ones. This does not challenge the fact that capitalist production is the source of our environmental crisis.

Green technologies and green energy have been available for over thirty years; if they have not been developed its simply because they are currently capital intensive. But they can be adapted without challenging the capitalist system.

In fact that is exactly what the Kyoto accord promotes. Supporters hope Kyoto will force capitalism to reform its nastier environmental practices and still make a profit.

This contradiction is played out in society as a whole. The government of Alberta, staying true to its neo-liberal pro privatization ideology, and the Federal Canadian Alliance Party opposes Kyoto. The federal Liberals, Bloc Quebecois and New Democrats support Kyoto. ...

Capitalism is the source of climate change. It is the source of environmental destruction because it is based on production for profit rather than for social use...

carbon sink credits and other market models of "sustainable development" they have been pushing since the Reagan-Thatcher era.

The fact is that some capitalists will profit from Kyoto and some capitalists will be negatively impacted. Some jobs will disappear, some new jobs will be created. Some expansion of resource extraction will be temporarily curtailed, and some new technologies will develop.

The Kyoto accord exists to ameliorate the worst effects of capitalism on the environment, it's a stop gap measure that does not challenge capitalist production.

Capitalism kills

Workers live in the communities that are exposed to environmental pollution; they work in the plants producing this pollution.

A recent study shows that pollution from Hamilton steel mills increases the chance of people living in that city suffering genetic damage and an increase in cases of cancer. This fact is also known to the workers in the plant represented by the Steelworkers union who have bargained for early retirement packages for coke-oven workers because their health is affected by this pollution.

The pollution and environmental hazards of capitalist production are not just a health and safety issue for unions, they are an issue for our communities. We must recognize that what is a health and safety issue in the plant is an environmental issue in society. The two are linked.

We need to make every battle over health and safety an environmental battle, and every environmental battle a health and safety issue. We need to move beyond workplace-based health and safety and create a movement for environmental health. Capitalism is killing us for profit.

It's not about jobs, It's about our survival

This issue is not about jobs – it's about our health, the health of our families, and our planet.

For workers to move beyond Kyoto, we must pose an alternative to the idea of sustainable capitalist development. The ecological crisis we face on a global scale is a result of capitalism. A kinder, greener capitalism is not the answer.

The free marketers are correct in defending their self-interest as capitalist apologists. They make no bones about it. They see the environmental crisis as a crisis of capitalism. It would do well for labour, social and environmental activists to realize this as well. You cannot challenge the environmental crisis of capitalism without challenging capitalism itself. It is not a matter of being either pro or anti-Kyoto. Capitalism is not sustainable.

The challenge we face is to replace capitalism with production for use, not profit. To abolish the wage system and replace it with a common ownership of production, to produce goods we need, under conditions that enhance our lives and our environment, not degrade them.

Socialism, the democratic self-management of our industries and communities, is our alternative to Kyoto.

Online campaigns work

BY ERIC LEE

In November last year, the Hilton Hotel in Sydney, Australia, closed down for a \$400 million face-lift. It was scheduled to reopen in 18 months time.

Several weeks earlier, the Hilton management told shocked employees that they were all going to be fired. Due to a loophole in the law, the maximum redundancy benefit was going to be only eight weeks pay (instead of the usual 16). Many employees would receive no redundancy pay at all.

None of the workers were guaranteed that they could have their jobs back when the five star hotel reopens in 2004. And this despite the fact that many worked at the hotel for over 10 years, with some working there for more than 20 years.

Not only was the Hilton management dictating inhuman terms to its workers, but it was refusing to talk to the workers' union – the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union. So the LHMU decided to launch an ambitious worldwide protest campaign aimed at forcing the Hilton management to the bargaining table.

They asked for the assistance of LabourStart (<http://www.labourstart.org>) – the online trade union news service which I founded in 1998 – and together we created an easy-to-use online campaigning tool called "ActNOW." People visiting the special web page we set up could send a message to Oded Lifshitz, the hotel manager, which read in part:

"We are all very disappointed to hear that after several meetings with your hotel workers and the LHMU Hotel Union you have not found it in your heart to come to a decent deal with your low-waged workers.

"This decision doesn't just reflect badly on the Sydney Hilton Hotel – but also reflects negatively on the worldwide Hilton



brand.

"Surely some part of the \$400 million renovation could have been used to ensure that all your workforce was treated equitably when it comes time to the shut down of your upmarket hotel, for the 18 month renovation program..."

"I will try to make contact with the management of the nearest Hilton Hotel and tell them that I am not impressed with what is happening at the Sydney Hilton."

"I will tell them that your actions are hurting the Hilton Hotel brand across the world."

Within hours, hundreds of email messages began pouring into Lifshitz's email inbox. For a businessman who relies on email, this became an intolerable situation. He couldn't change his email address, or simply stop checking the incoming messages – there might well be important business-related messages there. And every time Mr. Lifshitz turned on his PC, it froze up as hundreds more messages poured in.

After a few days, Lifshitz contacted the LHMU union. He asked them first of all, to stop flooding his email inbox. The union agreed – and we temporarily shut down the campaign. When the Hilton management still refused to discuss new terms, the union asked us to turn on the tap again, which we did. Hundreds more emails arrived.

In the end, three thousand emails reached the Sydney Hilton – the second most successful online campaign LabourStart had ever participated in. And the campaign went way beyond emails – many contacts were

made with organizations far and wide which could put pressure on the Hilton. Progressive clergymen, trade unionists in many other countries, and even the Rev. Jesse Jackson rallied behind the Hilton workers' cause.

On 1 November – seven weeks after the launch of the online campaign – the union issued a press release announcing victory.

"Sydney's 500 Hilton Hotel workers have won a magnificent victory," they wrote, "and they owe it to the more than 3000 people from around the world who joined a cyber-picket line, sending protest e-mails to the Hilton Hotel chain's top executives."

Hilton management agreed to increase workers' redundancy pay from eight weeks to 12 weeks or more, for the majority of their workforce who have loyally worked at the hotel for at least ten years. In addition, the hotel agreed to pay between one to five weeks retrenchment money to all its casual workers – who were originally going to be paid nothing.

Above all, the Hilton chain – which has seven other hotels in Australia – reached agreement with the union, and accepted the LHMU as its employees' representative.

One union leader hailed this as a "magnificent victory" and said that "in talks with the union the Hilton management acknowledged that this campaign – especially the emails from around the world – had bite."

Online campaigns are no substitutes for picket lines, boycotts, strikes and other tried-and-true methods of working class struggle. But they are a valuable addition to the labor movement's arsenal, as proven by the victory in Sydney.

Eric Lee is the editor of the LabourStart website, author of *The Labour Movement and the Internet: The New Internationalism* (Pluto Press, 1996), and an IWW member in the United Kingdom. His column will appear regularly in the Industrial Worker.

Salvadoran hospital strike battles privatization

BY BEN THORNTON

"The struggle continues!" So say the banners carried by striking health care workers and doctors in El Salvador as unions and popular organizations square off with the government to halt the privatization of public hospitals. On January 29, 21 strikers were arrested by riot police and members of the National Civil Police. A few days earlier, six workers were arrested at clinics in Lago de Ilopango and Santa Tecla. The STISS health workers union says the message behind the arrests is clear: "To terrorize those who oppose the neoliberal privatized model for public services."

Hospitals and emergency clinics remain closed as more than 10,000 health care workers, doctors and nurses have taken to the streets and occupied Social Security hospitals to protest government efforts to privatize health care. (Private hospitals serving the rich remain open, as do Ministry of Health hospitals which serve El Salvador's poor.) Workers have chained the iron gates leading to clinics, barring passage to administrators and all but the most dire health emergencies. In December, following a SWAT team attack, workers dragged a high-pressure water hose to the front door to defend the Hospital de Especialidades from further attacks by riot police.

What began as a work stoppage in July 1999 protesting the illegal firing of several health care union workers has blossomed into a full-blown conflict. When doctors with the medical college union (SIMESTRIS) joined the health care workers' union (STISS) in a show of solidarity, the Salvadoran government headed by President Francisco Flores responded by firing 221 more union workers.

In March 2000, after four months of marches, slowdowns and solidarity strikes, riot police attacked peaceful marchers at an emergency clinic in San Salvador. The attack sparked public outrage as scenes from the debacle made the evening news and patients suffering the effects of tear gas in the clinic made their way to the street to denounce the government's heavy-handed tactics. Some 30,000 protestors turned out the next day venting their disapproval and choking traffic on boulevards throughout the capital.

Apparently bowing to pressure, government officials were forced to the negotiating table and, in March 2000, signed an agree-

ment with unions not to privatize certain hospitals within the city. Six months later, the administration of the Institute of Salvadoran Social Security (ISSS) began privatizing concessions in those hospitals. When a labor court and the Supreme Court declared the firing of the 221 union workers illegal and ordered their reinstatement with back wages, Flores' government refused to abide by the courts' decision.

Expect the current conflict to intensify. When the Bush administration revealed its plan to negotiate the Central American Free Trade Agreement, President Flores' ARENA party, along with the National Association of Private Enterprise, took their cue to begin dismantling workers' unions. In an effort to break any resistance to the imminent free trade agreement, the Flores government gave the go-ahead to fire 11 STISS activists — setting in motion a series of events that would galvanize union resolve and popular support against privatization.

While other unions continue a precarious existence, STISS is one of the stronger bodies of organized labor. Forged in the civil war as a response to bloody repression by the Salvadoran government, the health care union may be El Salvador's best hope for finding an equitable solution to the problems posed by privatization in an impoverished country. Its demise would leave the door wide open to unrestrained privatization.

"Last year," reported STISS communications director Marco Cativo, "at least seven union organizations disappeared because their institutions were disappeared. By forcing the privatization of different concessions dealing with hospital staff and support, they hope to disarticulate the labor organization in this country."

According to Lorena Martinez of the Association of Rural Communities for the Development of El Salvador (CRIPDES), many Salvadorans fear CAFTA's consequences: "A Central American Free Trade Agreement would destroy Salvadoran sovereignty, allowing multinational corporations to sue if they felt that their (the corporation's) interests were threatened, for example, by an environmental protection law."

"Salvadorans might benefit from new jobs when U.S. factories move down," says Leslie Schuld, "but a sweatshop isn't really dignified work with a living wage ... and workers have no rights."



30,000 join "White March" to support hospital workers in San Salvador, March 2000.

On Sept. 5, the health care union responded to the firing of union workers and imminent privatization of the health system with a one-day protest strike. When the administration answered by firing 30 unionists, STISS called for an indefinite strike.

"After bad experiences with the privatization of the phone company, pensions, and electric energy, the people are fearful for the health question," Jaime Ayala of STISS explained. "So we made the decision to go on strike knowing that the cost would be terrible. We're in the fourth month now with no salary, but we've decided to carry this thing through until the conflict is resolved. There has to be a guarantee of labor stability without reprisals. ... They've (the government) tortured fellow workers, violated human rights. ... On December 6 there was a heavy conflict where hospitals were attacked and filled with tear gas. We can't lift the strike until there are guarantees."

The threat of reprisals is very real in El Salvador. Union workers live in a climate of fear and intimidation. "There are days that we don't sleep at our own houses and have to move from place to place because we've received death threats," Ayala said.

On Nov. 15, 2002, a group of armed men broke into STISS General Secretary Ricardo Monge's house, ransacked union documents, and threatened Monge and his family.

In an effort to dislodge union workers from the Maternity Hospital May 1, riot police attacked and wounded several workers using rubber bullets and tear gas. Hurling rocks and bottles, workers drove the police back in a furious battle. During the fight, patients including newborns were evacuated after the maternity ward was overcome by tear gas. One worker sports a gash in his head after being shot at point blank range by police. Since then, many workers have taken to sleeping in the hospitals in order to rebuff future attacks.

Despite government reprisals and threats from the notorious Salvadoran Death Squads, the union of the Medical College of Doctors (SIMESTRIS), moved to support the hospital workers in a show of unity against privatization. By mobilizing coordinated seizures of strategic highways and initiating "White Marches" (so called for the sea of white coats of the doctors and nurses uniforms) that wind through the capital with an estimated 200,000 protestors, the unions with support from popular organizations coordinated by the Citizen's Alliance of Anti-Privatization continue to gain strength.

"There's no going back on this thing"

says one nurse. "We're prepared to carry this to the final consequences."

But what are the final consequences? After four months without salary, desperation can turn dangerous as strikers continue to search for a peaceful method to force a settlement from an unrelenting government.

Jaime Ayala of STISS explained: "We're worried because this country is heading toward a war. There are already groups who are ready to take up arms again because of this conflict. The high cost of living, well the people already can't live with it."

In a country where the average working class salary is \$144 per month, privatization of medical services would be devastating. At present, the Institute of Salvadoran Social Security guarantees health care to the 15 percent of the population fortunate enough to earn a monthly salary. A life saving operation can be had for free or for a minimal monthly quota. On the other hand, private hospitals provide only for those with the money to pay. Expect one trip to the emergency room at the Hospital Diagnóstico, a private hospital in the capital city, to cost between \$80 and \$120 not including prescription drugs.

Day workers and campesinos who comprise the vast majority of the population but do not pay into the social security system are cared for in national hospitals administered by the Ministry of Health. Doctors and health workers in these national hospitals have begun work slowdowns and stoppages in support of unionized workers of the social security hospitals. The Ministry of Health also administers health clinics throughout the country.

Clearly conditions could be improved in the public hospital system, but according to union leaders the problems are administrative ones. Even the government points to poor administration of the health system when it makes its case for privatization. Ironically, the same government is responsible for appointing its administrative heads. "Health care shouldn't be an industry for profit," says Marcos Cativo. "It's a universal right. In El Salvador, he who pays the mariachi calls the tune, and in this country, private enterprise calls for whatever song it wants. When ANEP and the government talk to investors, they say 'here there is no organized labor' so that companies can come and do whatever they want with the workers. This is serious. It's time that the people realize that this government is not democratic; it's authoritarian. If we as the working class don't take care of ourselves, who will?"



"Not another trick for the people. For the health of Salvadorans, SIMETRIS!"

El Salvador: Violations of labor standards rife

A report by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions condemns El Salvador's failure to protect basic union rights in its Export Processing Zones.

Working conditions are terrible, and victimization of unionists is widespread. There is not one single collective agreement in place in the whole EPZ sector in El Salvador, and low wages, unsafe working conditions and intimidation are daily realities for the country's 80,000 EPZ workers.

El Salvador's Labour Ministry published a report on the situation in August 2000, which was immediately withdrawn due to the reaction of the EPZ companies. Made public by the National Labor Committee, the report found a clear anti-union policy in the maquilas whereby any attempt at union organizing was repressed.

While the situation of workers in the

EPZ's is one of the most flagrant cases of violations of trade union rights, violations also continue in the public sector. These include mass dismissals by the Social Security Institute, National Institute for Public Employees' Pensions, electricity generation company CEL, and Roma and de la Union hospitals.

Workers cannot, in theory, be dismissed if their names are on a union application in the process of registration. However, in practice there is considerable discrimination against workers for union membership or activities, and the legal prohibition against such discrimination does not begin to eliminate its widespread occurrence.

"EPZ's are a central plank of El Salvador's export strategy, and a big part of the strategy is the ability of companies to violate workers' rights with impunity," said Collin Harker, author of the ICFTU report.

Workers against war

continued from page 1

of only one international union, AFSCME, has passed a resolution against war on Iraq.* That one considers such an invasion a distraction from the war on terror and "a last resort," assuming the UN gives the go-ahead, but it is interesting because at the union's convention last June the leadership did all it could to silence and isolate antiwar delegates. Ultimately, it could not ignore what was percolating from below.

U.S. Labor Against the War is the result of a similar process. Since 9/11 at least 72 locals, 17 district or regional councils, 25 central labor councils, five state federations, and nine national labor organizations have passed antiwar resolutions. These represent more than 4.5 million workers.

"We are having this meeting because our members demanded it," Jerry Zero, secretary treasurer of Teamsters Local 705 in Chicago, which hosted the gathering, said at the outset. "Our membership is split 50-50. Fifty percent don't believe a thing President Bush says, and 50 percent think he's a liar."

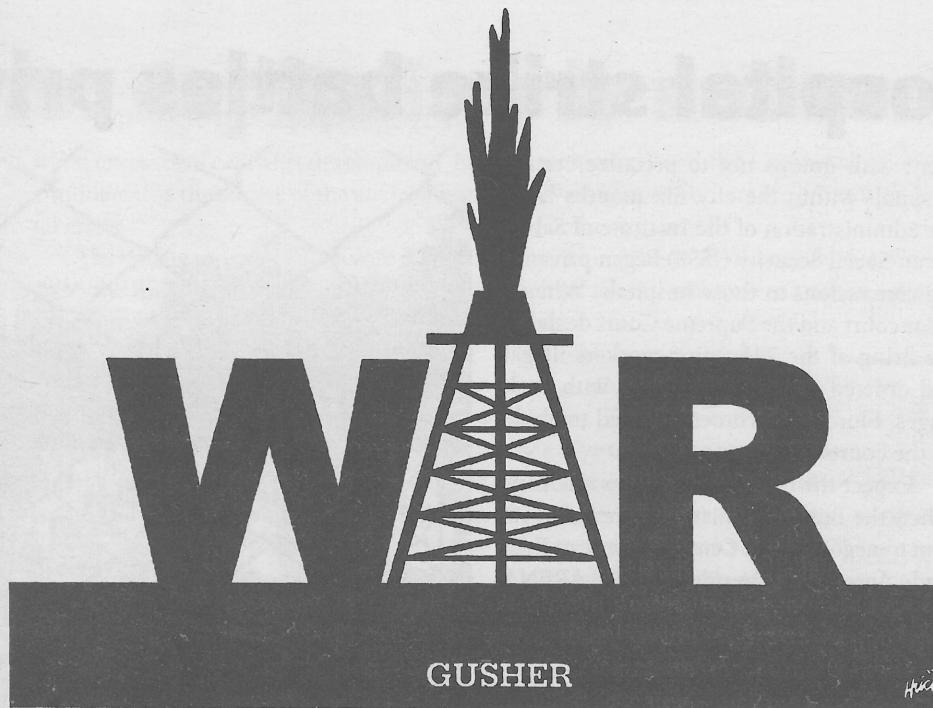
Local 705 is the second-largest local in the Teamsters. Zero calls its members largely conservative. While there are members who dispute this, it's fair to say that truck drivers in the heartland do not fit any standard antiwar profile. Last October a member of the local introduced an antiwar resolution. His father fought in Vietnam and bears the psychic scars. The statement does not embrace or even mention the war on terror, the disarming of Saddam, UN inspections or international military coalitions. It simply states, "We value the lives of our sons and daughters, of our brothers and sisters, more than Bush's control of Middle East oil profits," and "We have no quarrel with the ordinary working-class men, women and children of Iraq who will suffer the most in any war."

After noting the economic implications for the U.S. working class, it resolves that "Teamsters Local 705 stands firmly against Bush's drive for war." Zero said he had expected vigorous disagreement and was stunned when, out of 403 members present, no one spoke in favor of war. The resolution passed 402 to 1. 705's resolution became the template for the resolution ultimately adopted as the statement of U.S. Labor Against the War. Here, though, there was lengthy, passionate debate. It's worth reviewing that briefly for the larger lessons it holds.

First, disagreement needn't lead to ruin. As Bob Muehlenkamp, a longtime organizer who coordinated the meeting, noted, the subject was one of the most emotionally and politically charged issues humanity faces. It would have been bizarre, even troubling, if everyone present had moved in sheeplike agreement. People got excited, ideas were fought over, compromises reached; no one stormed out, and by the end of the day people who had been at opposite poles of the debate said they could work with the result.

Second, a united front requires a confrontation on just what is unifying. Debate hinged on whether the group should support disarming Iraq, containment of Iraq, UN multilateralism and inspections, or whether, like 705's statement, it should stick to simple principles of national and international class interest and opposition to war. The morning had been spent preparing to adopt the former position. Muehlenkamp pointed to internal union polls showing that people are more likely to oppose war if the U.S. goes ahead without UN approval. David Cortwright of Keep America Safe/Win Without War, which he described as "a mainstream patriotic coalition of Americans who are concerned about

*Some other U.S. unions have passed anti-war statements since this was written, and AFL President John Sweeney has signed a joint letter to Bush urging restraint. Most of these resolutions focus on the need for UN approval before going to war. Several Canadian unions and the United Electrical workers have passed stronger resolutions.



We establish U.S. Labor Against the War

Whereas, over 100 trade unionists from 76 local, regional and national unions, central labor councils and other labor organizations representing over 2 million members gathered in Chicago for an unprecedented meeting to discuss our concerns about the Bush administration's threat of war; and

Whereas, union members and leaders have the responsibility to inform all working people about issues that affect their lives, jobs and families, and to be heard in the national debate on these issues; and

Whereas, the principal victims of any military action in Iraq will be the sons and daughters of working class families serving in the military who will be put in harm's way, and innocent Iraqi civilians who have already suffered so much; and

Whereas, we have no quarrel with the ordinary working class men, women and children of Iraq, or any other country; and

Whereas, the billions of dollars spent to stage and execute this war are being taken away from our schools, hospitals, housing and Social Security; and

Whereas, the war is a pretext for attacks on labor, civil, immigrant and human rights at home; and

Whereas, Bush's drive for war serves as a cover and distraction for the sinking economy, corporate corruption and layoffs; and

Whereas, such military action is predicted actually to increase the likelihood of retaliatory terrorist acts; and

Whereas, there is no convincing link between Iraq and Al Qaeda or the attacks on Sept. 11, and neither the Bush administration nor the UN inspections have demonstrated that Iraq poses a real threat to Americans; and

Whereas, U.S. military action against Iraq threatens the peaceful resolution of disputes among states, jeopardizing the safety and security of the entire world, including Americans; and

Whereas, labor has had an historic role in fighting for justice; therefore We hereby establish the U.S. Labor Against the War; and

Resolve that U.S. Labor Against the War stands firmly against Bush's war drive; and

Further resolve that U.S. Labor Against the War will publicize this statement, and promote union, labor and community antiwar activity.

Adopted January 11, 2003, in Chicago.

Iraq but don't want to go to war" and which includes the Sierra Club, Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities, the NAACP and religious groups, had been invited to speak. He went into copious detail about UN procedures and explained how "we can win against Iraq, we can win the war on terrorism" without an invasion or other unilateral action.

Washington is crawling with labor officials, including some international union presidents, who would like to take a stand against war but are scared. They might be emboldened behind the shield of the UN, shoulder to shoulder with liberal business leaders. The problem is, at least half the people in the room believe that the threats to Iraq are part of a U.S. imperial policy, that the U.S. has and will manipulate the UN, that evidence against Iraq can always be manufactured or exaggerated, that solidarity with workers of the world places labor in natural opposition to war, and that any talk about crises in the Middle East cannot ignore the question of Palestine.

Bill Fletcher, formerly AFL-CIO education director, now the head of TransAfrica and a convener of the United for Peace and Justice coalition, spoke strongly on these issues and then warned, "We have to have a broad level of unity. If we make anti-imperialism the premise of our work then we're building a sect, and I'm too old for that."

Somehow along the way, though, the UN position got defined as the neutral one. A draft resolution was presented reflecting that, to which a group of delegates counterposed a modified version of 705's resolution. Thus began the debate. (I attended the meeting as a delegate from New York City Labor Against

the War, which was formed soon after Sept. 11, and this substitute resolution was initiated by two of our group's conveners.)

There were flared tempers, even moments of red-baiting. It seems some people had so prepared themselves for a sectarian hijacking of the proceedings that they were responding to some imagined revolutionary manifesto rather than to the plain-spoken prose of a Chicago truck driver. And of course other people stood to denounce labor bureaucrats, the Democratic Party, or sometimes just to hear themselves talk. Out of this wrangle came a basic understanding: unity demands simplicity and allows for differences. The final resolution has elements of both proposed drafts and includes neither patriotism nor Palestine; it makes no rhetorical flourish on the nature of fundamentalism or capitalism; it neither embraces the UN nor denounces American imperialism. It therefore allows all of those subjects and many more to be freely explored and debated in discussion and organization among workers, which is, or should be, the whole point.

Third, no one has a monopoly on representing workers' views. It's not true that workers are all conservative flag-wavers, any more than it's true that they're all organic anticapitalists waiting to be turned loose against the system. One of the problems with drafting resolutions meant to reflect what workers will be comfortable with is that the process can so easily tip into essentialism.

In Chicago there were moments when it seemed all of organized labor was being characterized as obsessed with terrorism and national security, scared to death, inclined to support military action though movable de-

pending on the details. Yet again and again delegates would tell of how the workers had surprised them: how they voted unanimously against war, how discussion was heartfelt and strangely one-sided, how the head of the local building trades council, against all expectation, took an antiwar stand. Many things determine the picture: race, sex, age, income, experience – and sometimes nothing anyone could have predicted.

What can probably be said without fear of contradiction is that a lot of people are confused, and that even if they have misgivings about war they don't think it's a subject for the union to take up. That last is a legacy of decades in which unions either recused themselves from discussion on the most compelling political issues of the day or were complicit with government policy and thus developed no independent analysis.

Given how anxious union leaders are said to be about sticking their necks out on the war question, maybe the most valuable thing they could do is to initiate open forums where information could be shared and issues engaged in freewheeling fashion. As at Local 705, their members might surprise them. Similarly, those labor bodies that have taken a stand might further the discussions they've already had. If they've passed resolutions supporting UN but not U.S. intervention in Iraq, what if the UN gives America its fig leaf and the sons and daughters of the working class go into battle? What if the go-ahead is bought with U.S. bribes and threats? If labor bodies have passed straight-up antiwar resolutions, what happens if a war on Iraq begins and is answered by terrorist attacks in the United States?

The debates are far from exhausted, and this is a time to talk with people, not at them.

In this spirit, on the night before the Chicago meeting Local 705 cosponsored a panel discussion the likes of which ought to be replicated in union halls, schools, community centers, veterans groups, anywhere that people open to experience and to the strong, true voice of the heart may gather.

It was billed as "Labor Voices and Veteran Voices Against War" but that hardly captures it. Bill Davis, an early member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the chief steward of a UPS Machinists local in Chicago, called it "a dream come true," merging his labor and antiwar identities. And his talk, about the nature of the military and its recruitment, the economic draft, the plight of veterans, the history of the American Legion as a home for strikebreakers, vigilantes, Klansmen and warmongers, put the class angle of militarism up front inescapably.

Loretta Byrd, recording secretary of Teamsters Local 738 in Chicago, talked about family and home, the twin threats of war and joblessness, and proved there are more compelling ways to say no to war than through resolutions, prompting the audience, "We've all heard that song 'War – What is it good for?' and then, shaking her finger, "Absolutely nothing." I imagined that through everyone's head might have been running "It ain't nothing but a heartbreaker/friend only to the undertaker... induction, then destruction, who wants to die?"

Trent Willis of ILWU Local 10 out of Oakland described the heavy weather for longshore workers. Brenda Stokely, who is president of AFSCME District Council 1707 in New York, reminded people that "the things that are worth fighting for always take a lot of nerve" and challenged the crowd, in words applicable far beyond that room: "If you cannot talk to your neighbors about your politics, your politics are irrelevant. If you cannot talk to your co-workers about your politics, your politics ain't worth having."

Dan Lane, who unionists across the country know from his galvanizing role in the Staley struggle of the early 1990s in Decatur, spoke of growing up in a boys' home and entering the Marine Corps at 17 because "it was just a natural progression" from the boot-camp style home and Saturday afternoons spent watching Hollywood war movies. He did two tours of duty in Vietnam, saw

HP sued over overtime pay

Two Hewlett-Packard programmers have sued the company, charging that they and other temporary workers were forced to work overtime without pay or benefits. The suit charged that HP improperly classified workers as "independent contractors" in an effort to evade overtime payments.

The two commonly worked more than 80 hours a week, but were told they would be fired if they demanded compensation for the overtime work.

Japanese boss arrested for forcing unpaid overtime

Japanese authorities arrested the head of a nursing home accused of forcing workers to put in up to 100 hours a month of unpaid overtime Feb. 3. Unions hope the case signals a crackdown on the common practice, euphemistically called "service zangyo" (no-pay overtime).

Tadao Nakamura, 59, chairman of the board of directors of Kikaku-kai, which operates the Shinmei-en nursing home in western Tokyo, was arrested after he was repeatedly warned by the Labor Standards Inspection Office, but still failed to pay overtime. The nursing home's payroll records were modified to hide an average of 50 hours of overtime a month for its 40 employees.

The nursing home's vice director defended the practice. "It is only natural we think time card records do not necessarily reflect the actual time worked. Is it really all right for slower workers to earn more by working overtime?"

A key demand in the Rengo union's annual spring labor offensive is to end service

more carnage than a soul is meant to handle, beat up an officer, was demoted from sergeant, collapsed, came home and went through 22 jobs in four years. He recalled that during the Staley struggle central Illinois was called "The War Zone" because of all the strikes or lockouts there at the time. "There is a war that is continually being waged against workers," he said.

"That is the way of life. It's a war where people don't usually come out and have strikes. It's a war where someone is just forced to sign a piece of paper. Because that's what most people deal with going into negotiations every day. It's not about negotiations; it's about them telling you what you're supposed to accept. And most of the time, people accept; you don't hear about them." The war abroad had come home. It just took a while to realize it had always been home.

Rather than spend gobs of money on ads in *The New York Times* that nobody reads, antiwar groups ought to take this kind of talk on the road. There isn't so much support for the war that some real soul-to-soul and pressure in the right places can't turn it around. During question time an 18-year-old from DePaul University who is trying to rouse students against the war said he thought the veterans should come to his school. After all, he said, he has only 18 years of knowledge and experience, "and that's not a lot."

Excerpted from the Counterpunch web site.

Workers protest terror slur

Garment workers protested the U.S. government's designation of Bangladesh as a "terror-risk" country Jan. 24 with a human chain in central Dhaka. The protest was organized by the National Garments Workers Federation, which fears the label will result in travel restrictions and fewer orders, and will cost many garment workers their jobs.

Australia... continued from page 1 is refusing to join the action. TWU officials said they opposed the war, but also opposed action that might interfere with providing supplies or services to the military. Other unions said they might not strike, instead holding stop-work meetings, joining anti-war demonstrations, or taking other action.

zangyo. A union survey last June found many salaried workers put in an average of 30 hours a month of unpaid service zangyo.

In January, Toyota stopped all production lines for 15 minutes to hold emergency meetings on how to stop the practice. Toyota was earlier advised by the Labor Standards Inspection Office – after a similar warning in 2000 – to stop unpaid overtime.

The government says it is alarmed by cases of illness, even death, resulting from

FIGHT for SHORTER HOURS



extra overtime in the face of personnel cuts in the prolonged recession.

Norwegians work less

Norwegians work an average 150 hours less a year than Swedes, and also much less than Finns and Danes. New figures prepared by the European Union show Norwegians aged 15 to 64 working an average of 1,057 hours a year.

That compares to 1,207 hours for the Swedes, 1,147 hours for the Finns and 1,125 hours for the Danes.

Norwegians generally work much more than the Italians and French, and also more than the Germans and Dutch. OECD figures showed Italians working an average 882 hours a year, while the French worked 950, the Germans 967 and the Dutch 997.

Americans, by contrast, work an average 1,331 hours a year, followed by the Japanese at 1,253 and the British at 1,220.

Where's the reason?

BY F.N. BRILL.

More and more desperate and cynical, the Bush and Blair governments continue creating reasons for attacking Iraq.

But U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair has been caught making up lies. Blair produced a dossier "proving" Iraqi guilt and the need for war. Colin Powell's speech to the United Nations quoted extensively from Blair's dossier and called it "exquisite." This dossier, provided by British intelligence, was to shred any opposition to the war.

Too bad some 19-year-old Swedes noticed that large parts had been lifted from *Jane's Intelligence Review* as well as the thesis paper of Ibrahim al-Marashi, an American of Iraqi descent, published in the *Middle East Review of International Affairs*.

It's not necessarily improper to use information from outside sources, although identifying them is always good. So why did Blair & co. hide the sources? Because most of the information dealt with Iraq in 1991, not 2003. So the governments are giving us 12-year-old information as an excuse for war.

Want another reason to be outraged? It turns out the uncredited writers oppose the war with Iraq! But you could never tell by reading the U.S. papers. The most circulated report of the scandal has been from the *New York Times*. The *Times*' piece is, curiously, lifted from British news sources and apparently didn't investigate the controversy at all.

Al-Harashi is quoted saying: "I am surprised, flattered as well, that this information got used in a U.K. government dossier... Had they consulted me, I could have provided them with more updated information."

Sounds pretty friendly to Bush and Blair, no? This is what Harashi told other reporters, ones who bothered to call him, "This is wholesale deception. How can the British public trust the government if it is up to these sort of tricks? People will treat any other information they publish with a lot of skepticism from now on."

Sean Boyne, the other plagiarized reporter, works for *Jane's Intelligence Review*, the world's premiere military magazine. He was quoted by *Mirror* reporters as saying, "I don't

French workers combat 'shorter hours' speed-up

Rather than reduce regular working hours or hire new workers, many employers responded to France's 35-hour law passed in January 2000 by adding extra vacation days and requiring workers to cram the same amount of work into fewer days.

Although unemployment has dropped by 4 percent since the law went into effect, many workers complain that despite as many as 58 days a year of vacation time (in addition to weekends), they are always tired because of speed-up conditions.

"If you cut the hours without increasing the work force, everybody has to work harder," postal worker and union official Jean-Paul Rouillac told the *New York Times*.

The shorter hours law was amended to give employers greater flexibility, and was suspended altogether for hotel and restaurant workers because employers say they can not afford to follow the law. Bosses have taken advantage of this flexibility (allowing them to annualize hours) to cut overtime pay and streamline operations. As a result, some workers have lost income and many have experienced intensified work schedules.

However, few French workers are willing to give up shorter hours. France is where Paul Lafargue wrote the classic pamphlet "The Right to Be Lazy," arguing that under socialism workers could enjoy a three-hour work day. While the *New York Times* complains that French workers lack the "get-ahead ambition that drives their counterparts in the United States," most say they prefer time to relax and do as they please, rather than being chained to the workplace.

Many unions are demanding that more workers be hired to handle the workload.

like to think that anything I wrote has been used for an argument for war. I am concerned because I am against the war."

Some related items left out of the capitalist media... From *Counterpunch*: "Sen. Richard Lugar, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, quietly passed word to Russia and France that their countries will be frozen out of staggeringly lucrative post-war oil contracts unless they roll over and endorse the US attack."

Most ironic of the current crop of unreported news: The UN covered up a tapestry reproduction of Spanish artist Pablo Picasso's famous anti-war painting "Guernica" that hangs in its chambers. "Guernica" was painted in protest of the first aerial bombardment of civilians during the Spanish Civil War. Why cover up the most important work of art of the 20th century? Because it would have been the backdrop for Colin Powell's address to the UN.

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Top Dog Syndrome

They say, "every dog has his day."

When somebody rises within an organization, it's normally thought their stress increases with the greater responsibility. In fact, the opposite appears to be true – those on the lowest rungs of the ladder suffer most from stress; those at the top suffer least.

A long-running study, supported by the Medical Research Council, has correlated employee rank with health for civil servants working in London. Employees were found to age faster and have poorer health with descending levels of rank. The lowest grades (messengers and support staff) are three times more likely to die over a 10-year period than senior administrators. This effect still remains after the data has been adjusted for obvious lifestyle differences (e.g. higher status employees have access to better medical care and tend to eat healthier diets).

Senior roles have more responsibility, but they also have greater control and predictability. Low-level employees can't predict the sources of stress, and have little control – their stress hormone levels are typically much higher than their bosses.

These hormones prepare the body for short term emergency – they turn off long term body-healing functions like tissue repair, hence the decline in health of the chronically stressed. For animals, this stress response lasts for about three minutes while they escape danger; for humans it can last 30 years while they worry about work.

It's true that pay tends to increase with rank, but income was shown to be a relatively unimportant factor in health compared to the direct behavioural causes of stress.

Although the rich tend to live longer than the poor in a given society, rich countries often have a lower average life expectancy than poorer nations. The degree of inequality within a society is a more important factor.

Societies with steep social hierarchies were found to be less physically healthy than egalitarian populations.

These findings are supported by two other areas of research. The same effect of low status leading to poor health has been confirmed in other hierarchical mammals, most noticeably baboons (diet as a factor was carefully ruled out – the effect was behavioural). Also, research into human happiness found that countries with the happiest citizens were those with low social inequality, rather than economic success alone.

Meanwhile, inequality is perceived to be rising in the UK. In the latest British Social Attitudes survey, 87% of the population were unhappy with the gap between high and low incomes (compared with 72% in 1983).

Reviews: Los Trabajadores struggle for a future

BY MITCH CHANIN

"I came here illegally and this against the law of the United States, but it is not against my law, nor is it against the law of my family. Even if they're American, they can't tell me I can't work to support my family." (Ramon Castillo Aparacio)

On Tuesday, March 25, at 10:30 p.m., the PBS series Independent Lens will air a new documentary about the lives and struggles of immigrant day laborers in Austin, Texas: "Los Trabajadores/The Workers." The documentary offers both a gripping story – similar to the stories told in movies like "El Norte," "La Ciudad" and "Salt of the Earth" – and the kind of careful description and analysis of a specific segment of the work force characteristic of recent documentaries like "Aumento Ya!," about farmworkers in Oregon, and "A Day's Work, a Day's Pay," about unpaid "welfare" participants in New York City.

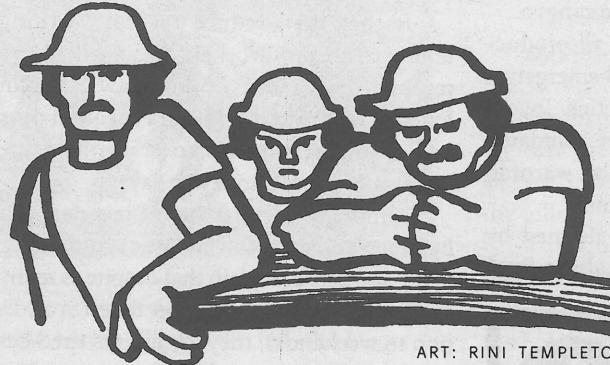
This 48-minute-long movie is extremely engaging and informative, and would be useful as an educational tool in unions, community organizations, schools and many other settings. The filmmaker has also created a website – www.daylabormovie.com – that allows users to order copies of the video, access a discussion guide that can be used to lead formal and informal conversations after screenings, and find background information and links to workers organizations and immigrants rights groups.

Around the United States, more and more construction work is carried out by non-union workers who are hired a day at a time and who receive no benefits. Immigrant day laborers face constant discrimination, unpaid wages, and the constant threat of deportation as they work extremely long hours so that they can send money home to support their wives, children and relatives.

Many day laborers are organizing, generally through non-traditional, community-based organizations outside of the mainstream of the labor movement. They have made important gains, but the workers' status as undocumented immigrants represents an enormous obstacle to transforming their industry or even to holding onto what they have accomplished.

"Los Trabajadores" provides a detailed and moving depiction of immigrant workers' experiences leaving their families in Latin America, crossing the border, and working for very low pay to build the new houses, offices and other projects that make Austin's rapid growth and prosperity possible.

The movie focuses on a year in the lives of Ramon Castillo Aparicio, from Mexico,



ART: RINI TEMPLETON

Changes in the structure of the economy have led to more poverty in Latin America, increased migration to the U.S., and a growing divide between affluent business owners ... and the increasing number of low-wage workers.

and Juan Ignacio Gutierrez, from Nicaragua. We watch as they and their community – several dozen workers who gather together at the same pick-up spot before dawn each day to wait for contractors to hire them – organize themselves to improve their conditions. The workers oppose an effort to expel them from the business district and force them to move their gathering place to a residential neighborhood several miles away. Residents in that neighborhood fear and detest them, and fiercely protest the city's effort to relocate the workers there.

When it appears that the workers have lost, they organize to make the best of their situation at their new site. In order to limit their exploitation, they agree to demand and enforce a minimal hourly rate; they set up a work list to stop favoritism and to keep workers from undercutting each other; they denounce contractors who don't pay what they owe; and they work with prosecutors to go after back pay. They also reach out to their new neighbors and establish rules for behavior to make them feel more comfortable.

We see Ramon, Juan and their co-workers at their jobs; cooking in their apartments; celebrating a journey one of them is about to begin to visit his family, even though he is not sure he'll be able to make it back across the border again to the U.S.; and visiting the INS offices to apply for amnesty. We see them conducting meetings to determine the new rules for their workers center, speaking at City Council hearings, receiving trainings in workers rights. Ramon and Juan share their thoughts, hopes and feelings at length and emerge as complex people with incredible hope, compassion, determination and insight. (We also watch both men and their families undergo great personal tragedies.)

The movie interweaves commentary about the social, political and economic con-

text of the workers' experiences with a straightforward account of their struggles. We see how changes in the structure of the economy have led to more poverty in Latin America and increased migration to the U.S., and in Austin to a growing divide between an affluent group of business owners, investors and professionals and the increasing number of low-wage workers.

The day laborers share their own analysis of the problems that prompted them to leave their coun-

tries, and of the situation they face as undocumented immigrants who are not regarded as full members of the society in which they live and work. Ramon, for example, explains how structural adjustment and the devaluation of the peso led to his being laid off from a good-paying job at PEMEX, Mexico's state oil company, and how the steady decline in the Mexican economy produced by NAFTA eventually forced him to leave the country to seek work. The filmmaker provides useful background information through captions.

The film also shares the perspectives of many other people whose lives intersect with the workers. It includes extensive interviews with Ramon's wife and daughters in Mexico, and offers the thoughts of a Mexican-American member of the city council who plays an important role in establishing the new workers center; the center's neighbors, some of whom come to rethink their initial hostility, and some of whom continue to protest the workers' presence; a border guard who reflects on his own experience as an immigrant and the irony of his current position; and a police officer who seems genuinely dismayed that workers could be deported in retaliation for demanding that their employers obey the law and give them the back wages they are owed, and who seems eager to help them despite their status as illegal aliens. All of these perspectives together provide a brief but complex introduction to the multiple dimensions of this situation.

One limitation of the movie is that it does not include any voices from the building trades unions or any interviews with non-immigrant construction workers. While we hear at one point from an official that Austin's growth would be impossible without day laborers, and that construction companies could never pay union rates and still be able

to carry out all of their projects, the filmmakers do not seek out the perspectives of higher-paid construction workers.

The world of day labor seems almost completely separate from other segments of the construction industry. The viewer is left to wonder how other workers have treated the day laborers. Have the unions embraced immigrant workers, rejected them and tried to keep them from encroaching on the jobs they traditionally hold, or simply ignored them? What do rank-and-file construction workers think about the new arrivals?

A second limitation of the movie is that it does not explore the immigrants rights movement – in particular the movement for a general amnesty – that began growing very rapidly in the late 1990s. An fuller examination of the relationships between immigrant workers and non-immigrant workers and of the growth of the amnesty movement might provide a clearer sense of the options that immigrant workers and their allies have available to them for action.

Wobblies in Taiwan

BY DAVID TEMPLE, NEW YORK

When you go to the IWW website, above the masthead, you can find the preamble and an introduction to our union in 12 languages. Now there is a new Taiwanese/Mandarin link. This is a first step in reaching out to China, and Hong Kong workers. It will also help the New York City GMB reach out to fellow workers here in New York's Chinese restaurant and sweatshop apparel industries.

Knowing that I would be vacationing in Taiwan with family during the summer of 2002, I began contacting a number of labor, left-leaning, socialist and Taiwanese independence groups. Taiwan, just 12 years after the lifting of martial law, had legalized unionism, alas, pie card type. It was my hope that IWW-style unionism could be introduced as a viable alternative to the government-sanctioned business unions.

My first contact was with Lim It-Hong, the director of TaiwaneseVoice.net, a global webcasting platform. We met in Taichung City July 19 and discussed creating an English-language program on the IWW, American labor history, and the anti-globalization movement. At that meeting, I was introduced to Lin Yi-Yuan, one of the organizers of the Powerless People Organization, a group to support workers' rights, and with whom we broadcast a two-hour radio call-in program.

On August 7, we entered the studio, a transformed two-room apartment. With my wife, Leona, translating into Taiwanese, we gave an introduction to the IWW on Voice of the Ocean, 95.9 FM in Taichung. After an hour discussing the IWW we took call-in questions from listeners for an hour. On Aug. 9, my wife and I went to Taipei to meet with members of Focus on Globalization.

On Aug. 10, FoG presented an introduction to the IWW and how our principals could be applied to forming a new teachers' union in Taiwan. A listing had been made of the event in a progressive weekly called POTS. For the first hour, with the help of two Mandarin translators, I described how the United Federation of Teachers (the AFT local in New York City) keeps teachers passive and how Wobblies in the union were trying to agitate and educate for more direct democracy. For another two and a half hours, I was asked nuts and bolts questions about how de-centralized collective leadership could be implemented in the nascent Taiwan Teachers Union. Afterwards, an article about the event appeared in POTS. A number of people were very interested in self-management and the IWW.

Through these efforts perhaps thousands of Taiwanese workers and progressives were exposed to ideals of the IWW in Taichung and Taipei, Taiwan. I will continue to be in touch with the people I met in Taiwan's new labor and socialist movements.

New book searches for the real Joe Hill

REVIEW BY ALFREDO NUBEROJA

Joe Hill: The IWW and the Making of a Revolutionary Workingclass Counterculture. by Franklin Rosemont. Charles H. Kerr Publishers, 637 pages, profusely illustrated. Available for \$17 from IWW Literature Dept.

Joe Hill is one Wobbly whose renown has extended far beyond the membership of the IWW, becoming associated with labor struggles around the world. While he is known principally as a writer of labor songs and a martyr for the cause of labor, this tome by Franklin Rosemont points out many of Joe Hill's other talents.

For one who has achieved such international fame, very little is known about his personal life. Two fields of mythology about Joe Hill have been promulgated by those who never got to know him – benevolent superman and malicious fiend, the latter image put forth by the upholders of the status quo and their lackeys, the capitalist press. The idealized mythology has been built up by those outside of the IWW, including left-wing organizations on the fringe of the labor movement, particularly certain political groups who have tried to claim him as their own.

While most material written on Joe Hill either has been about his songwriting or his trumped-up trial and subsequent martyrdom, Rosemont's book goes into his other activities that not only had an impact on his the IWW but on the labor movement in general. Hill was an accomplished musician and composer, as well as an artist and cartoonist (many of his cartoons were published in IWW papers). Unfortunately, due to the Palmer raids, only a few of his cartoons have survived, which appear in this book along with post cards he had sent to fellow workers. There is also a reproduction of a painting he made while still in Sweden.

Either through modesty or his all-important dedication to the cause of industrial unionism, he spoke little if anything about himself, but this book divulges that he was a many-faceted person. This is attested to by those who got to know him, including surviving family members. Joe Hill long ago attained mythological proportions for many who claimed to know him, but reliable reminiscences of those who actually knew and worked with him are included here.

While the capitalist press did their best

to picture him as a common thief who wouldn't stop at murder, those who knew him testified that that was far out of his character. He would do nothing that would cast a bad light on the IWW. His trial for the alleged murder of the grocer Morrison has been written about before in the IWW press – a trial that was a travesty of perjury and the exclusion of defense witnesses – but this book places the trial in the broader context of the frame-up in the U.S. "justice" system.

Rosemont also points out Hill's influence on many subsequent movements, such as feminism, the struggle for racial equality, ecology, and even hoboehemia and the Beat generation, as well as his authenticated part in the Mexican revolution. Joe Hill examines Hill's many appearances in popular culture, from science fiction novels to rock 'n' roll.

Within these 600-plus pages there is not one bit of tedious reading. This is an important book for any Wob library, and Fellow Worker Rosemont is to be commended for having done a great job. Read this book and get your scissorbill friends and relatives to read it too in the hopes of bringing the ideas we stand for closer to fruition.

World jobless rate reaches 180 million

Two years of economic slowdown has pushed the number of unemployed to new heights worldwide, with little prospect of any improvement in the global employment situation this year, according to a new report entitled "Global Employment Trends" issued by the International Labour Office.

The ILO estimates that the number of unemployed worldwide grew by 20 million since the year 2000 to reach a total of 180 million at the end of last year. ILO estimates largely track workers receiving jobless benefits, and so undercount workers in the informal sector and those who were unable to obtain jobs in the first place.

Particularly hard hit have been women and youth, who often have jobs that are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks.

The number of working poor, or workers living on \$1 or less a day (a measure of poverty reflecting the ILO's dominance by employers and governments), resumed its upward trend, returning to the level of 550 million recorded in 1998.

While the global economic slowdown and post September 11 developments increased unemployment worldwide, Latin America and the Caribbean were hit hardest, with recorded joblessness skyrocketing to nearly 10 percent. Youth unemployment in the region hit 16 percent in 2001, with nearly all new jobs for young people emerging in the informal economy.

Official unemployment has been rising steadily in the industrialized countries, from 6.1 per cent in 2000 to 6.9 per cent in 2002. In the European Union, unemployment decreased between 2000 and 2001, from 7.8 per cent to 7.4 per cent, but began rising again in 2002 to 7.6 per cent.

Meanwhile, in North America, unemployment increased rapidly in 2001 and 2002, from 4.8 per cent to 5.6 per cent in the United States and from 7.2 per cent to 7.6 per cent over the same period in Canada.

Korea: Unions to seek equal pay for part-time workers

The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions has declared plans to demand equal wages for both regular and contingent (part-time and contract) workers this year.

Contingent workers now account for more than half of Korea's 13.6 million wage earners and on average are paid 47 percent less than full-time workers.

The KCTU urged the incoming government to outlaw wage discrimination against contingent workers, halt the privatization of state-owned firms and extend public-sector workers' rights to take collective action.

UK fire fighters beaten by 'Labour' union-busting

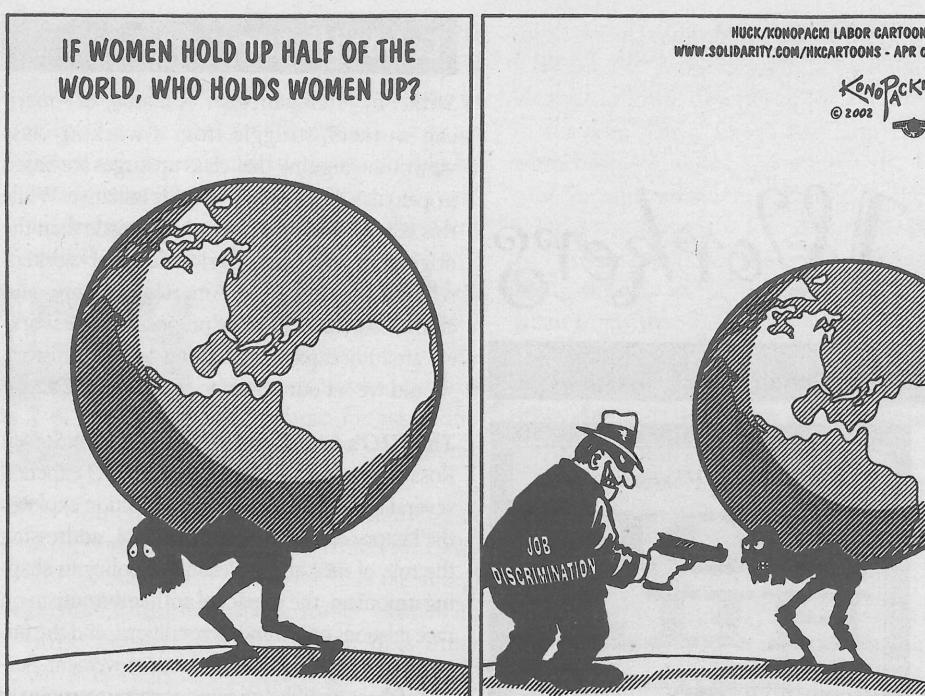
The Fire Brigades Union abandoned a series of brief strikes in the face of threats by Britain's "Labour" government to introduce emergency legislation allowing the government to impose pay, terms and conditions, and to close fire stations.

The government's threat led to calls from some union officials for the government's resignation, but the FBU announced Feb. 4 that it was suspending future strike action.

The threat came as 19,000 troops stood by, prepared to scab on the striking firefighters. Many speculated that the rush to end the dispute was motivated more by a desire to free up troops for war against Iraq than by public safety concerns.

The union had mounted a series of 24-hour and 48-hour strikes after the government refused to negotiate a settlement. The union had offered to suspend strike action in late January, but authorities responded by withdrawing from scheduled negotiations.

Even Conservative Party officials expressed concern that if the government proceeded it could further inflame the situation; especially if workers defied the legislation.



Puma flees union workers in Mexico

BY CAMPAIGN FOR LABOR RIGHTS

After working for three weeks without pay – a violation of Mexican labor law – 190 of the 250 active workers at the Matamoros Garment company initiated a wildcat strike January 13. Located in the central Mexican state of Puebla, workers said they "are forced to work mandatory overtime, the guard was given orders to lock the door, [and] wages are less than the minimum wage."

More than 160 workers formed an independent union – the Sindicato Independiente de Trabajadores de la Empresa Matamoros Garment (SITEMAG). As usual, the company informed the workers that they already had a union. And so for the first time in four years, the so-called "union representatives" visited the factory to persuade workers to end their strike, work harder, and vote against an independent union.

Collusion between company management and sweetheart unions is widespread in Mexico, where companies chose a union often without the workers' knowledge. At the Matamoros Garment factory, workers have been "represented" by the CTM – Confederation of Mexican Workers – which is widely viewed as corrupt and authoritarian.

During the one-day strike, workers contacted Puma, the German sportswear producer that is one of the factory's major customers. Puma's Code of Conduct guarantees basic labor rights, including freedom of association. Acknowledging the violations, Puma promised "immediate action" and an immediate presence in the factory.

On January 17, plant manager John Whittinghill announced Puma's immediate action: cancellation of its production orders from Matamoros and refusal to pay employees' back wages. Despite its promises, Puma never sent any company officials to the factory. Instead, they just cut and ran.

Matamoros workers filed papers to gain

legal recognition for their union January 20.

Again the company response was immediate – by the next day all Puma tags were removed from the factory. Calling the union leaders into their office, Matamoros management informed them that as a result of their efforts the factory had indeed lost its Puma contract and would not pay their wages.

After a flurry of protests, Puma agreed to negotiate with the independent union if it retracted its complaints. But on January 24, Puma confirmed that it had terminated its contract with Matamoros, claiming to have done so back in October 2002. And yet workers continued sewing Puma apparel up until the strike on January 13. Puma officials were at the factory as recently as January 18.

Mexico is the largest garment exporter to the United States, and the majority of garment workers are located in the central Mexican state of Puebla. Over 100,000 people sew apparel in Puebla, which is also known as the "FTAA Capital." Puebla is the gateway to the maquila industry in Mexico and the rest of Latin and Central America.

In Puebla, there is a stark contrast between high profits for maquila factory owners and garment workers' abysmal labor conditions. If workers resist the sweatshop system, state authorities have not hesitated to apply heavy-handed repression against independent labor movements, including assaults on workers with riot police and arrests of union leaders.

Two years ago, a similar demand by Matamoros Garment workers for back pay ended when police attacked peacefully protesting workers, leaving a number of them wounded; many workers were also locked out and never paid.

Please contact Puma CEO Jochen Zeitz at jochen.zeitz@puma.com, (978) 698-1124, to protest Puma's "cut and run" departure from the Matamoros Garment factory.

Workers shut job sites to protest trial

Despite a court injunction barring 600 Grocon construction workers from stopping work to join a rally in support of unionist Martin Kingham Feb. 6, Grocon sites were shut down across Melbourne, Australia.

Some 6,000 construction workers marched through the streets of Melbourne chanting "Stop the war on the unions" and "Dodgy commission, shove it up your arse."

The march brought traffic to a standstill in central Melbourne. Workers then rallied outside Melbourne Magistrates Court, where Martin Kingham, Victorian state secretary of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, faced two contempt charges stemming from the union's refusal to hand over names of participants in a training program to a royal commission investigating construction industry unions. The union feared the commission would finger shop stewards attending union courses to employers, leading to them being victimised.

Grocon claims it is losing millions of dollars as a result of protests against the charges.

The royal commission was launched to try to break unions' power in the industry, and is expected to recommend far-reaching legal restrictions on workers' rights.

Kingham spoke to workers before entering the Melbourne court house: "Builders workers know those who try to kick us in the head from lofty heights will be pulled down and choked."

Police fire on 3,000 workers protesting casual labor

Nigerian police fired on Nigeria Labour Congress members picketing Tower Aluminium Nigeria Plc in Lagos Jan. 30, injuring NLC members and journalists. A News Agency of Nigeria reporter had a gun pointed at her by a police man, threatening to shoot.

The clash began when police began shooting into the air to scare away some 3,000 NLC members, who were picketing over the company's continued casualisation of labor. Union officials were also briefly detained by police.

Russian unions step up resistance

BY BORIS KAGARLITSKY

Presenting the figures for 2002, Russian statisticians will no doubt say that production has risen, wages have increased, and that after three years of growth the standard of living has returned to pre-1998 crisis levels.

However, what the reports will not show is the sharp increase in the number of labor disputes over the past few months. A strike by air traffic controllers hit the news because it threatened to bring air travel to a halt across the country. But a small and successful strike at the ZiL truck factory in Moscow passed virtually unnoticed. And while the country was celebrating the New Year, an unprecedented dispute broke out between Norilsk Nickel and the company's union.

Common to all these disputes have been demands for better pay. Not so long ago, even many months of wage arrears did not raise much protest. The recent economic growth seems to have created favorable conditions for the revival of the labor movement.

Norilsk Nickel is one of the global leaders in its sector – producing not only nickel, but also platinum and other precious metals. Wages are impressive by Russian standards at about \$700 per month; although compared to what workers get in Canada and the United States it's a piffling sum, especially given that Norilsk Nickel sells on the same markets and for the same prices as its Western competitors do.

For the past few years, an agreement has been in place between Norilsk's management and the union – a member of the All-Russian Confederation of Labor – stipulating that wages be indexed to the tune of 20 percent per annum, roughly in line with inflation.

Lately, however, the company has not been sticking to the agreement, and to make things worse prices have been shooting up. The union demanded that the agreement be honored, while management accused workers of wanting to "eat the company."

All this is happening at a time when Norilsk Nickel is expanding. The corporation is purchasing a factory in the United States. It financed the recent election campaign of former CEO Alexander Khloponin, who won the Krasnoyarsk gubernatorial contest. The Norilsk mayoral election is now approaching, and the company has to ensure that its man wins. Furthermore, in the best tradition of big business, Norilsk Nickel "contributes" to politicians across the political spectrum. All this doesn't come cheap.

From management's point of view, corporate solidarity dictates that workers should finance their masters' ambitious plans out of their own pockets. However, the union did not back down, and management has declared war. Workers are being handed forms renouncing their membership in the union. The reason for quitting has already been written in for them: "I do not wish to participate in collective action and strikes that undermine the company I work for." All they have to do is sign on the dotted line.

As often happens in such situations, the measures backfire. On Dec. 28, a union meeting voted overwhelmingly to take collective action, and now one of the country's largest companies is on the brink of a strike. The 20 percent indexation issue has become a matter of principle and, moreover, the union's very existence is now at stake.

Perhaps the future of the Russian labor movement is also at stake. If the Norilsk union is smashed, it will send out a strong signal to other companies. Until now, unions have not posed much of a problem – by and large they have been feeble and ineffective. However, if they start to defend workers' rights – as in the case of the air traffic controllers and at Norilsk – they will, no doubt, experience the more brutal aspects of Russian business practices in full.

If the Norilsk union is victorious, workers in other companies will surely start to assert their rights as well.